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Warrior narratives : Vietnam veterans recounting their life experience before, during, and after the war through in-depth phenomenological interviewing.

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WARRIOR NARRATIVES; VIETNAM VETERANS RECOUNTING THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCE BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE WAR THROUGH IN-DEPTH PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWING

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by

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To Marie Therese,

who helped to sustain my energy and vision;

who sacrificed much toward this end.

To Vietnam veterans herein and abroad,

who have sacrificed much for their Country; who have

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whose tenacity in finding healing brings hope to survivors.

To Stu and Lee,

early mentors who showed me how to "walk point"

with great courage and compassion as a therapist.

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whose time, patience, energy and faith were indispensable.

ABSTRACT

WARRIOR NARRATIVES; VIETNAM VETERANS RECOUNTING THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCE BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE WAR THROUGH IN-DEPTH PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEWING

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Many Vietnam veterans are currently suffering from PTSD. The vast literature on PTSD is grounded in the positivistic paradigm. Treatment approaches in the field of traumatology that are positivistic face significant limitations, including difficulty bearing witness to the survivor, forming a collaborative relationship, and crafting a coherent and meaningful survivor narrative.

This author plans to listen to the stories of Vietnam combat veterans within the context of postmodern theory. Based on the theoretical frameworks of narrative and social constructionism, this author will conduct in-depth interviews with Vietnam veterans which will then be transcribed, crafted into narratives, and analyzed for thematic connections, similarities and other elements of narrative analysis. The author seeks to understand trauma in the context of the veteran's life narrative as constructed in interviews.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> When we tell our stories to one another, we, at one and the same time, find the meaning of our lives and are healed from our isolation and loneliness. Strange as it may seem, self-knowledge begins with self-revelation. We don't know who we are until we hear ourselves speaking the drama of our lives to someone we trust to listen with an open mind and heart. (Keen & Valley-Fox, 1989, p. xviii)

This dissertation is about storytelling and Vietnam veterans. The verb "storytelling" is intentionally chosen to designate its commonplace and endogenous role in the life of every individual; the survivor of catastrophic trauma and the non-traumatized individual. The more familiar parlance in trauma research genre would be: "Vietnam veterans and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)." PTSD as a reified diagnosis (i.e. the DSM-IV), is a social construction containing connotations this research reexamines. Storytelling--broadly conceived of and more basic in scope--is at the center of this research proposal, specifically the narratives of combat Vietnam veterans. The interviewer (and the reader) will bear witness to these stories of lives impacted by trauma.

This proposal provides an alternative to the positivist paradigm underlying most of traumatology research in psychology. By viewing traumatization as a socially defined phenomena, it is only a short step to conclude that healing is also a social phenomena. Once trauma is brought into the realm of the interpersonal and social (rather than viewing trauma as an intrapersonal event), new conceptualizations emerge that suggest new possibilities for healing. These possibilities include the creative and transformative functions of telling one's story to an empathic audience and hearing one's own words in the telling and the reading of one's story; of bearing witness to another (who was similarly traumatized)

through reading their story and then meeting them. This proposal intends to explore and examine these possibilities.

Statement of the Problem

Many Vietnam veterans are suffering from PTSD in contemporary times and need new, more effective modes of therapeutic help that bear witness to their trauma narratives. The problem this author undertakes is to see whether a social constructionist narrative approach can help the Vietnam veterans in this sample cope with and/or recover more fully from PTSD.

There is a need to attend to problems faced by the soldiers this country sent to war [i.e. 40 percent were draftees (O'Brien, 1994)] over 20 years ago. The war is history, but the psychological legacy remains alive. For instance, at some point since returning home from the Vietnam War, nearly one-third (30.6 percent) of male Vietnam theater veterans (over 960,000) have met the criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Kulka, et al., 1990). It is estimated that 15.2 percent of all male Vietnam theater veterans currently have PTSD (Kulka et al., 1990). The prevalence is also affected by high levels of combat exposure. The lifetime prevalence rates of PTSD were seven times greater for males in the highest war zone stress areas (Meichenbaum, 1994).

Despite the growth of postmodern approaches in psychological theory and therapy, virtually no attempts to apply social constructionism and narrative to trauma treatment have been made. Three notable exceptions were found. Bar-on (1992), in an innovative effort, applied the method of narrative analysis to a traumatized Israeli soldier. The understanding of the soldier's experience through his narrative made his otherwise irrational behavior rational and illuminated the complexity of incompatible values impinging on his meaning making process. Higgens (1994) interviewed forty individuals who met her criteria of *resilience*. She wanted to understand the role of resilience in severely traumatized individuals who overcome their painful life events and live fulfilling lives. Wigren (1994) examines the inability of trauma victims to form narratives of traumatic experience and

asserts that this incomplete narrative processing of traumatic experience causes symptoms of posttraumatic stress.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to listen to the stories of Vietnam combat veterans within the context of postmodern theory. The treatment literature, as surveyed by Meichenbaum (1994), converges on the need of veterans to *tell their stories*. The narrative framework underlying this study will parse the veteran's life into pre-Vietnam, Vietnam, post-Vietnam and future; thus, providing the dimension of time to their narrative revealing the impact of combat trauma on the veteran's life story.

In this study, I suggest an alternative approach to empiricist methodology. I seek to collaboratively join in the meaning making process by including the reciprocal effects of the interviewer (myself) and interviewee on each other. I seek to bear witness to the trauma narrative. Rather than looking only at the intrapsychic elements of traumatology, I seek to place emphasis on the social construction of meaning and identity as revealed in the interviews. I seek to view trauma in the context of the veteran's life narrative.

Sharing one's trauma narrative in one's life context plays an indispensable role in: bearing witness to one's *own* pain and confusion, making sense of an otherwise senseless experience, reconnecting to others (i.e., overcoming estrangement), and re-animating the meaning making process. The telling of the narrative is valuable in spreading guilt and responsibility onto the collective shoulders of many, reducing societal psychic numbing. There is a crucial link between public acceptance and private resolution of the trauma (Jay, 1991). Telling the narrative is also instrumental in creating an identity that is capable of incorporating the traumatic experience into itself (versus splitting off unacceptable elements) and making distressing affect tolerable.

The performance of the stories will be seen as crucial. There are questions that will be implicitly influential in the study. The interviews will be largely unstructured but certain themes, topics and questions will be looked for within the spontaneous disclosure of the

veterans. These areas may be explicitly explored at points in the interview where the context allows for it. In other words, the desired information will be obtained either spontaneously in conversation or more directly solicited through a prompting question. The different questions for each of the five interviews (see the "questions" section contained in the methodology chapter for more information) attempt to address the following areas:

1. What personal narratives have these veterans constructed that describe their Vietnam experience? Do common patterns or themes emerge? How do they portray themselves in their stories?

2. To what extent have they integrated their traumatic experience into their post-Vietnam lives (i.e. healing narratives)? What has been helpful in this effort? What has been problematic in this effort? Can healing patterns or trends be identified in their stories?

3. To what extent have they shared their Vietnam experience with others? What reception did they receive? To what degree do they think others care about their experiences?

4. What effect will lifespan interviews that take into account the trajectory of time have on their meaning-making processes? Or, how will these interviews affect them?

5. How has the war affected their interpersonal relationships? What relationships were the most sustaining and healing for them?

6. What learning, if any, can those who deliver psychotherapy to combat veterans and trauma survivors achieve through narrative understanding?

7. Do they feel the stories told about them--either personally or collectively--are accurate? How would they like to change them?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in its attempt to shift the conceptual emphasis off the "traumatized mind" of the Vietnam veteran and onto the joint-negotiation of reality between

therapist and survivor; a movement from "cure" to the pragmatics of meaning making in social (Gergen, 1994; Bruner, 1990) and historical context (Chessick, 1990). I believe that the telling of a story is constitutive (Wigren, 1994; Russell & Wandrei, 1996; Engel, 1995; McAdams, 1993; Parry & Doan, 1994; Sluzki, 1992). When presented with the opportunity to share his story, the veteran is faced with the task of reconstruction. What is shared and what is excluded is a selective process. In the telling of the story, the story is transcended and pain and suffering are placed in a different context offering new and more facilitative meanings. The meaning making process is re-animated. In telling the story, the veteran's sense of identity--both private and social--is changed. The way he knows himself and is known by others is altered, making possible new forms of relationship, as well as new ways of overcoming estrangement. In the telling of the story, the audience (i.e., this writer and the other veteran participants) has opportunity to acknowledge and honor the pain inherent in the veteran's traumatic experience. By taking seriously the pain of the veteran, the veteran likewise is encouraged take seriously his own pain, relating to it authentically and honestly.

Estimation of significance includes predicting who will benefit from this study and who will obtain the benefits (Seidman, 1991). I hope that therapists who work with veterans--as well as other survivors of traumatic experience--will benefit. Namely, therapists who have become disillusioned with modernist approaches and explanations. Therapists may discover new excitement and potential in reformulating the recovery process as a social event. In viewing healing as a joint effort of survivor and community, healing suddenly is characterized as a shared responsibility. PTSD is de-pathologized as it is perceived in a relational context. I hope the veterans will obtain the benefits. Veterans who have had negative experiences with modernist therapy experiences may find help in their quest for healing. I also hope that family and friends will come to see their vital role in the recovery process. For them, bearing witness is not likely to mean hearing the horrors of the experience like the therapist does, but instead, bearing witness can entail support,

patience, suspension of judgment, listening, presence, tolerating ambiguity and ambivalence, and instilling hope.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Two Alternatives to Empiricism: Social Constructionism and Narrative

The field of psychology has a story to tell. The story may vary depending upon who is speaking (i.e., which psychological specialty is represented), but the overarching narrative is essentially the same: empiricism. Empiricism is concerned with the elucidation of essences and the establishment of systematic and objective truth. Empiricists believe: the knower and knowledge are independent, language is representational of truth and reality, human nature is a universal phenomenon, the character of therapy is technical and instrumental and the therapist is the knower of normalcy and pathology (Anderson, 1995). Empirical knowledge derived from psychology is communicated through scientific languages (i.e., empirically based accounts), culminating in therapeutic theories. These therapeutic theories "contain explicit assumptions regarding (1) the underlying cause or basis of pathology; (2) the location of this cause within the client or his or her relationships; (3) the means by which such problems can be diagnosed; and (4) the means by which the pathology can be eliminated" (Gergen, 1994, pp. 238-239).

Research and therapy of traumatization informed by empirical knowledge *put* the trauma *in* the survivor. With few exceptions, the field largely looks for the etiology of PTSD and its resolution intrapsychically. This intrapsychic emphasis is evident by the theoretical frameworks associated with the treatment of trauma. The focus of behavioral (Keene, Fairbank, Caddell & Zimering, 1989), cognitive-behavioral (Foa, 1991), psychoanalytic (Marmer, 1991), constructivist (McCann & Pearlman, 1990), and neuropsychological/memory models (Kolb, 1987; van der Kolk, et al., 1985; van der Kolk, 1994) support the view that trauma resides in the person. The story of psychotherapy, as it is depicted here, is defined and predetermined prior to meeting the client. Gergen (1994) describes how empirically based therapies affect the session:

> It is this background that establishes the therapist's posture toward the client's narrative, for the client's narrative is, after all, made of the flimsy stuff of daily stories--replete with whimsy, metaphor, wishful thinking, and distorted memories. The scientific narrative, by contrast, has the seal of professional approval. From this vantage point it is clear that the therapeutic process must inevitably result in the slow but inevitable replacement of the client's story with the therapist's. (p. 239)

Although these empirical conventions are helpful and informing, they may be distracting us from alternative models which are more social in nature, and as such, more closely depict the vicissitudes of the survivor's experience. Since trauma occurs in a social context (i.e. having others present) making it a communal construction (McNamee, 1992), it is reasonable to conceive of resolution and healing as a social act. Even if trauma occurs in isolation and is not inflicted by a another human being (i.e., a natural disaster), the post-trauma experience of telling one's story is a social event necessary in the construction of meaning.

Vietnam veterans--as do all survivors of catastrophic trauma--have a story to tell. Their story is one of atrocity. Their audience is the civilian population. The civilian audience, with rare exception, has minimal awareness of the veteran's story and the story's abominable context (i.e., the daily reality of guerrilla warfare in a triple canopy jungle and rain forest).

Psychotherapy that is steeped in the empiricist paradigm may find difficulty bearing witness to the veteran's story. Empiricist theory seeks to "predict and control" which takes the therapist out of the moment and usually promotes prefabricated narratives of etiology and treatment. Psychotherapy that is informed by *post-empiricist* theory--or *postmodernism*--has a different ability to bear witness to the trauma survivor. Since meaning is viewed as a collaborative endeavor, listening in the spontaneity of the moment and creating a shared reality provide necessary elements for bearing witness.

The following section elaborates on two postmodern theories that are concerned with bearing witness to the survivor's narrative. Social constructionism emphasizes the communal aspects of meaning and the complexities of knowledge, while narrative theory draws attention to the stories that form an individual's identity, how he or she is known by him- or herself and by others.

Social Constructionism and Narrative

Knowledge is socially constructed through language; discourse is an artifact of communal interchange (Gergen, 1985). This statement is a central premise of social constructionism, a postmodern alternative to empiricism. Social constructionism maintains that all *truth* is contextual truth. To separate truth from its context, and posit a universal, objective, and context-free reality, is to ignore the social context of all meaning and language. Shotter (1993), arguing the merits of social constructionism, urges empiricist-based psychology to "abandon the 'grand narrative' of a theoretical unity of knowledge, and to be content with more local and practical aims" (p. 34). The belief that an orderly and systematic world is *really* available for perception *out there* is the residual aftermath of the Enlightenment world view.

Therapy and/or research founded on the tenets of social constructionism is a therapy that implores the clinician to *listen*. The clinician enters a relational context where meaning is collaboratively formed in the dialogue. The *truth* is *local* truth, arrived at in the immediacy of the conversation and embedded in context, in opposition to global or objective truth. So "truth" is in relationship, and is both communal and context-bound. If one cannot reach consensus in a dialogue, then no truth (i.e., mutual understanding) is reached in that interaction. To assert that truth exists outside of, or apriori to relationship, is to make the error of positivism.

Social constructionism endorses a *not knowing* and a *knowing* position. This perspective (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) implies awareness and acceptance of one's prejudices and biases; thus, *knowing*. Yet, there is no effort to know in advance, prior to

the encounter with another person; thus, *not knowing*. Knowing, loosely conceived, is achieved in the present dialogue and is ever in flux. Not knowing is a goal which allows for meanings to be explored, created or changed in the conversation. In other words, when ideas enter the researcher's thinking, they are made public, "checked out", revealed. Private evaluative knowing that pertains to the client, in the context of therapy, is discouraged. Withholding pertinent ideas and concealing meanings, especially ideas and meanings of a judgmental nature, closes down the dialogue. This type of impoverished conversation can quickly turn into a monologue. The prejudices and biases are not held as private preconceptions or theoretical formulations, but are expressed freely in the conversation as ideas, not "truth."

Narrative is a growing theoretical approach in psychology. There is nothing "new" about narrative. In fact, storytelling is as old as recorded history. We make sense of experience through words (i.e., words grasp onto meanings) (Andersen, 1996) and words are fashioned into stories (McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). We are known by and through stories (White & Epston, 1990). Our self-knowledge (identity) is composed of stories that have been incorporated into ourselves. We edit through selective memory which stories we incorporate into the self. This constructed "self" is presented to ourselves and others (Crites, 1986). Narratives also are based in time. Every story has a beginning, middle and end. Time similarly impacts the individual who faces constraints by existing in the present yet also having a past and future.

Narrative ideas portray individuals as accounting for their experiences in stories (McAdams, 1993), and sharing these stories with others. There is a recursive component to this storytelling process: The stories of who they are shape the experience; the experience shapes the story. Additionally, the language used in telling the story implicitly shapes the meaning (Andersen, 1996) as does the audience (or anticipated audience) who bears witness to the story (Roberts, 1994). Since we are the stories we tell, when the story changes so does our identity (Engel, 1995).

The more coherent and plausible a story, the more we ascribe "truth" status to it (Gergen, 1994). In this way, some stories take center stage in a culture while others are relegated to more marginal positions (White & Epstein, 1990). Of importance here are the stories of those who have been traumatized because they are frequently marginalized (McNamee, 1992). This is often because trauma stories are usually fragmented and inchoate in their initial tellings (Wigren, 1994; van der Kolk, 1994). As such, the stories may seem incredulous and be met with skepticism. The more coherently a story is articulated, meeting the cultural rules of a "good" story, the more plausible it becomes to the culture that it occurs within (Bruner, 1990).

Social constructionism and narrative are theoretically compatible, whereby a narrative applies to the individual while social construction applies to discourse between two or more people. One clarification is necessary. Narrative always implies a social context. The narrative is an account of *what happened* and *who one is*. This account is formed from the language and meanings of local cultural life and flows from social interaction and daily conversation (Shotter, 1993). The narrative is the result of stories one tells of himself and/or stories others tell of him. In either case, the verb "tell" implies audience. To have a story but to lack an audience ultimately disempowers the story, potentially limiting its inclusion into one's identity (i.e., dissociation).

There is a challenge to the field of trauma studies to embrace narrative. At the 1995 International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies XI annual meeting, the keynote speaker, Donald Meichenbaum, addressed the entire body of participants. He entitled his talk: "Treatment of Trauma: Current Status and Future Direction." In attempting to predict the future of trauma treatment, he proposed the study and implementation of narrative. He challenged the audience to ". . . further the field for the potential of narratives" (Meichenbaum, 1995). Elsewhere, Meichenbaum (1994) examined therapeutic objectives given by trauma clinicians who treat traumatized individuals and concluded that the theories

shared a common belief: with regard to trauma, psychotherapy is a form of "literary method" where the client becomes the narrator.

The Important Role of Social Context

Social constructivism and narrative provide an alternative view to the traditional empirical models of trauma. To date, they have not yet been diligently applied to the study of trauma. In fact, a literature search in April, '95, revealed one reference to the prompt "PTSD and narrative." Since constructionism and narrative are about bearing witness, and trauma therapy is largely about putting words to the horrible experience, it makes sense to join these postmodern approaches with trauma psychotherapy. In stating that the social context plays an important, albeit neglected, role in traumatology, this proposal is suggesting a way of understanding trauma that views the horrific event(s) in social contexts; from the survivor's immediate family, to his peers, to his religious organization. Social constructionism and narrative theorizing provide the means to arrive at such a context. Rather than placing the emphasis primarily on the individual's intrapsychic response to the traumatic event and ignoring larger contextual issues, social contructionism anchors the trauma in relationships. A relational view of trauma recovery considers how trauma is socially constructed by family, friends, society and the mental health profession. This view seeks a "shared reality" between survivor and community, overcoming subjective experiences of blame, estrangement, alienation and abandonment, which are commonplace in the wake of severe trauma.

Trauma, the Meaning Making Process and Postmodernism

Another reason for suggesting the implementation of postmodern therapies in the treatment of trauma is that the experience of traumatization directly impinges upon the survivor's meaning making processes (Lifton, 1973; 1988; McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Epstein, 1991; Benyakar, et al, 1989; Roth & Newman, 1991; Parson, 1986; Shatan, 1978) and postmodern therapies, such as narrative and social constructionism, are explicitly involved in the continuous process of creating and

transforming meaning (McNamme & Gergen, 1992; Andersen, 1991; Anderson, (In press). Following traumatization, the dynamic aspect involved in generating new meaning becomes static. Healing from traumatic wounding requires the restoration of the ability to generate meaning.

To illustrate how trauma affects the meaning making process, Robert Jay Lifton's ideas will be presented. Lifton is a psychiatrist who has studied catastrophic trauma including Hiroshima, the Holocaust, and Vietnam. To demonstrate the natural *fit* between traumatization and the role of postmodern therapies, Kenneth Gergen's ideas will be considered. Gergen is a social psychologist crusading for postmodern alternatives to empiricism. Both men are concerned with the transformation of meaning. It will be shown by the end of the following section on meaning making that postmodern therapies are highly useful in helping survivors of trauma because postmodern therapies bear witness, appreciate contextual elements and facilitate the transformative process of meaning[1] ; each vitally significant in the healing process. This proposal argues that trauma therapy has an unexpected ally in postmodernism.

Lifton (1973; 1976) focuses on the meaning making tendency of the individual. He positions meaning making within the larger context of *self-process*. The self-process of the individual is characterized by continuous psychic re-creation. The self is optimally dynamic, transformative and developing. The self is always in a state of flux, negotiating meanings from lived experience.

Traumatic life experience poses a threat to psychic re-creation. Psychic numbing stops the self's dynamic re-constitutive efforts. The person who typically transforms experience into a coherent story, now faces an overwhelming challenge in meaning making. The transformative self-process becomes static due to the nature and inchoate meaning of the traumatic event. The traumatic experience produces a *fixed* narrative, a story that defies assimilation into one's self account and halts the psychic transformative process. In support of conceptualizing trauma as a fixed narrative, Rosenfield (1992) states:

> We understand the present through the past, an understanding that revises, alters, and reworks the very nature of the past in an ongoing, dynamic process. Psychological or physical trauma appears to "fix" memories. . . . That is, the brain isolates painful experiences and removes them from the dynamic process of understanding. What is fixed is not a "memory" but an organizational ability; and what is abnormal is that this breaks the continuity--the dynamic relation with ongoing experience. . . . (in West, et al., 1994, p. 65)

The continuous psychic recreation that characterizes the self is in delicate balance with *coherence tendencies* of the self-process. Change is only meaningful in relationship to sameness. Coherence provides the sameness or integrity to the self. Coherence tendencies may be thought of as the individual's narrative effort to depict *who he or she is* in social situations. Her narrative is socially constructed, based in language and culture. She actively edits the narrative in whatever way she finds meaningful. She edits stories in or out, depending on their agreement with the self narrative. This narrative-in-progress provides coherence for life events; thus, making them meaningful.

Lifton explores the relation of meaning making to traumatology. Lifton, as just stated, suggests a new, unexplored dimension in meaning making: What happens when meaning making stops? Under what conditions does meaning making stop? Lifton is not alone in depicting trauma as capable of stopping meaning making and recovery efforts as re-animating the meaning making process. Viktor Frankl also stresses the need to generate meaning in trauma healing. Frankl (1984) states: "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering" (p. 106). Surviving trauma means finding meaning.

To summarize the preceding paragraphs, the individual seeks to transform his or her meanings into more complex and elaborate meanings; constructions of self, others and world. When the traumatic event is silenced within the larger culture, the meaning making process is impaired and inhibited. A traumatic encounter has the following three effects upon the meaning making process: the fluid ability to transform and generate novel

meaning becomes static and reified, the ability to integrate experience into a coherent story becomes blocked and the pre-trauma narrative becomes alien and incompatible with the post-trauma narrative.

The reality of death affects the meanings one generates and is relevant to survivors of trauma. Death and the continuity of life, represent our oldest and most fundamental image for understanding human existence. Lifton (1976) introduces the theme of *finiteness* as a ubiquitous presence in meaning making. Often, our own mortality is not in the forefront of our meaning making. According to Lifton, all seek a new and more viable sense of symbolic immortality. This is why traumatization is so threatening to the individual: trauma is symbolic of death. When our meaning making becomes disintegrated and our transformative ability to generate new meaning becomes static, our subjective experience is one of death. In some cases involving extreme traumatization, the vital motion of life--continuous psychic recreation and renewal--is halted. The continuity of life ceases; the symbolism of death begins and may predominate in time.

The preceding paragraphs depict the continuous psychic recreation of the self. Lifton's interest is on the *process* of generating meaning instead of the *content* negotiated by the process. He understands that meaning is always negotiated socially, sensitive to the social context of the individual. Relationships affirm the continuity of life, the ongoing creation of meaning, and the formation of narrative. Living in the social context of relationships is vital to human health and symbolic immortality (i.e., our memory will live on in the lives of those we have touched). Trauma directly impacts our sense of being *connected* to others (Lifton, 1979). The customary aftermath of severe traumatization is estrangement, separation and isolation from others. Thus, in addition to the disruptive effects on psychic renewal and the threat of nonbeing, trauma leaves the survivor feeling alone and abandoned.

Gergen and Lifton both share a common interest in meaning making and social context. Lifton examines meaning making in relation to catastrophic trauma; Gergen

examines meaning making in relation to modernist and postmodernist paradigms of psychological theory.

Gergen's (1994) emphasis is the joint-negotiation of reality (versus reality conceived in the individual mind) and the pragmatics of meaning in a social context (p. 236). All meaning is socially constructed and conveyed via language. Narrative is a chief vehicle for generating meaning, but Gergen believes we need to press beyond the task of reconstructing narratives. He uses the example of therapy to make his point. He believes the ultimate challenge for therapy is "to enable clients to participate in the continuous process of creating and transforming meaning" (1994, p 245). He describes the therapy as reflexive and creative, enhancing the meaning making process of the client.

While both Lifton and Gergen describe the vital role of meaning, Gergen places greater emphasis on the social context of meaning. The "conversational matrix" the individual finds himself or herself in is inseparable from his or her meanings. The social process of generating meaning appreciates "the contextual relativity of meaning, an acceptance of indeterminacy, the generative exploration of a multiplicity of meaning, and the understanding that it is unnecessary to adhere to an invariant story or search for a definitive identity" (Gergen, 1994, pp. 249-50).

Narratives gain much of their utility primarily within social interchange. Gergen (1994) explains how narratives "are constitutive components of ongoing relationships, essential for maintaining the intelligibility and coherence of social life, useful in drawing people together, creating distance, and so on." He continues: "Stories of the self enable us to establish public identities, to render the past acceptable, and to follow the rituals of relationship with ease." (p. 247). Just as Lifton emphasizes the fluid nature of knowing, Gergen describes the fluid nature of narrative constructions, which are "open to the shifting tides of relationship" (p. 249).

Since postmodernism is expressly about the business of generating meaning, can we recommend postmodern therapies for helping the traumatized individual? Can Lifton

inform the postmodern therapies, when it comes to meaning making and traumatology, by describing the conditions under which meaning making can lose its fluid quality and transformative capacity? These provocative questions deserve consideration. When a survivor of trauma presents himself for help, and complains of psychic numbing (static meanings and affect), disintegration of identity (disrupted narrative), isolation and estrangement from others, and feeling "dead" inside, should the healing relationship consist of elements designed to generative new and transformative meanings, create a flexible and cohesive survivor narrative, examine the social ramifications of the survivor's experience, and discuss alternatives for creating a viable sense of symbolic immortality? If so, trauma therapy has found an ally in the postmodern therapies.

Narrative, Social Constructionism and Meaning: Why Veterans Need to Tell Their Story

The Vietnam War was a very politicized, unpopular war. This fact subjected the Vietnam veteran to many forms of social discrimination. Compounding this situation was (and is) the frequent inability of society to separate the war from the warrior. The typical civilian is ignorant of the nature of guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, the unusual and unrelenting stressors and pressures, the strategic use of children as weapons by the Vietnamese, the confusion over who was ally and enemy, just to name a few. I have heard Vietnam Veterans refer to the movie "Apocalypse Now" in their description of Vietnam. In the film, as the journey down the river progressed, it became more chaotic and surreal, ending in a form of insanity where nothing seemed to make sense anymore. The veterans were impressed with how well this film captured their Vietnam experience, especially the irrationality of it.

The survivor of any trauma must deal with the precarious balance between the need to tell his trauma and the risk of becoming ostracized from community. Herman (1992) depicts this balance as crucial: "The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (p. 1). But even if we ignore the horrific content of the trauma stories that one's community refuses to

hear, we are left with stories that often do not fit our definition of a story. For example, every story has a plot. A plot is the organizing theme that identifies the significance and the role of the individual events. The plot ". . . functions to transform a chronicle or listing of events into a schematic whole by highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development and outcome of the story. Without the recognition of significance given by the plot, each event would appear as discontinuous and separate, and its meaning would be limited to its categorical identification or its spatiotemporal location" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 19). The experience of Vietnam for many veterans did not have an intelligible plot. This difficulty stemmed from the veteran's inability to integrate the events into a plot whereby it could become understandable in the context of what has happened. The role of bearing witness thus becomes more difficult. Not only does the traumatic content make bearing witness difficult for friends, family and society, but the trauma narratives do not fit our idea of a comprehensible story.

When Vietnam veterans share their story, the Veterans Administration (VA) frequently is a part of their post-Vietnam story. The VA is the major source of medical and psychological help for many veterans. Yet, the VA is a government organization representing the bureaucracy so often despised and avoided by veterans. It also places the VA in the awkward position of determining eligibility for disability compensation while rendering therapeutic services. What this means is that if the Vietnam exhibits signs of healing, his financial assistance faces reduction. If he no longer needs benzodiazepines for anxiety or medication for sleep, he risks losing his compensation. The other side of this complex relationship between the veteran and the VA, is the potential for entitlement in the veteran's attitude. With his tragic losses from the war, his inability to share his story to a larger compassionate audience, and other very painful events inflicted by an indifferent society, he may come to feel that he deserves every penny, every available resource he can get. This attitude of "I have it coming" often stems from the perception that the Vietnam War set his life on a negative trajectory and deprived him of an otherwise "normal"

existence. Despite this potential for entitlement, the Vietnam veterans have not overwhelming sought assistance. In fact, only four percent of Vietnam veterans have applied for compensation claims for PTSD and only ten percent of veterans with current PTSD and twenty percent with lifetime PTSD have ever used V. A. facilities (Kulka, et al., 1990).

Another related theme occasionally found among veterans is a sense of entitlement from the government due to their role as "guinea pigs". They believe the government used them in quasi-experiments and they must now live with the consequences (i.e., "agent orange" defoliant).

Vietnam veterans often faced pejorative attitudes by WWII veterans. Complicating matters, many Vietnam veterans went to war hoping to make their WWII fathers proud of their soldier status. Upon return, many Vietnam veterans heard messages from their father's identical or similar to: "You lost *your* war," "It was never even declared a war, just a conflict," and "You might have won, if it weren't for the drugs." Instead of finding a new connection with their fathers through combat experience, many found only judgment.

Over twenty years after the end of the Vietnam War, Robert McNamera--considered by many the "architect" of the war--stated that the war was a mistake and never should have happened. He is the highest ranking official to have ever made such a statement. The dominant discourse on the matter was that American involvement in Vietnam was to stop the spread of communism and keep the South Vietnamese from falling into the hands of the Communist North Vietnamese. The subjugated discourse on the matter often came from the Vietnam veterans themselves. The veterans were the first to cry out about the insanity of the war and how it was fought. But they were careful to pay homage to those who died in the war, keeping their supreme sacrifice of life sacred. They separated the war from the warrior. Many veterans felt society blurred this important distinction and by doing so, blamed the veterans for the war and dishonored the heroic sacrifices of those who died in war. A large number of veterans I have seen felt lied to by their government and betrayed

by society. One veteran shared how he heard President Nixon say on a radio news broadcast that American forces were not in Laos, but only in Vietnam. He was in Laos on a mission, listening to this radio broadcast.

The homecoming experience was a major source of oppression and shame for many veterans (Appendix A). I have heard and read of numerous stories of Vietnam veterans hurrying into restrooms upon arrival to United States soil. They quickly changed into civilian clothes so that they could not be identified as Vietnam veterans. Other stories include Vietnam veterans being cursed, called names, spit upon, hit by thrown objects and attacked physically. Not only do these experiences dissuade the veteran from telling his trauma narrative, but they may in fact contribute directly to the development of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Lubin, Fontana, Rosenheck, 1995). Based on the data obtained from The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, only two percent of cities and towns made any celebration gesture for the returning veterans (Lubin, et al., 1995).

The relevance to narrative and social constructionism is obvious when the plight of Vietnam Veterans is considered. Here we have a population that experienced atrocity at about 18 years of age. They returned to their communities after the war only to be silenced. The basis for their silence ranged from politics, public contempt and criticism (i.e. inability to separate the war from the warrior), grotesque imagery, ignorance, and misinformation and socially incompatible thematic elements. The young veterans searched for an understanding and empathic audience. The performance of their war narrative was essential in regaining perspective and reentering civilian life. The sharing of combat experience is not only crucial in meaning-making, but plays a role in atonement and civilian identity formation (Laufer, 1988). When society bears the existential burden and gruesome imagery that war inflicts upon its sons and daughters (e.g., nurses), the healing process is animated and dynamically facilitated. If there is no collective audience to bear empathetic witness, the pain is rendered static, the *war* self and the *civilian*---or adaptive--self cannot cooperate,

and the healing process is aborted. The stories likewise become static, and imprisoned within the survivor, creating a "truncated war self" (Laufer, 1988). Over time, the stories become dissociated from their affect, except in intrusive phases of intense, revisited emotion. The stories lose their context and become fragmented in memory. This fragmentation affects the survivor's identity (Parson, 1988). This disintegration occurs in the absence of a societal audience that is courageous and ethical enough to bear witness and collectively shoulder the consequences of war. For many Vietnam veterans, their home coming was marked by silence. The collective societal audience had *pre-formed* stories of who they were (i.e., "baby killers"). Therefore, the war narrative went largely unsolicited leaving an unremitting need for it to be retold.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF STUDY AND METHODS

Epistemological Bases for Choosing In-Depth Interviewing

The design of this study is qualitative in nature, and as such, is compatible with postmodern premises for research. While modernist premises which underlie quantitative approaches are based on such concepts as empirical reality, observer-independent objectivity, certainty and universal truth, postmodern theory believes the notion that "our world and our experiences of it are constructed through interactions in which we are an active participant observer, and that each construction, each account, is open to constant revision" (Anderson & Swim, 1993, p. 146). In-depth phenomenological interviewing is cognizant and sensitive to this postmodern position. This type of interviewing stresses the participatory nature of dialogue and its role in the ever-evolving formulation of meaning.

The design of this study subjugates *positivism* to meaning making. Positivism assumes that there is *truth* that can be *discovered* with appropriate methodology, and maintains the notion that observer-independent observations yield objective, generalizable, explanatory truths (Anderson, 1995). This positivist position underlying empiricist frameworks of the social sciences has been criticized for its inadequate philosophical tenants (Rorty, 1979, 1991; Gadamer, 1976). Bruner (1990) recommends that the conventional aims of positivist science, including its ideals of reductionism, causal explanation and prediction, be reexamined. He suggests an alternative; a psychology that concerns itself centrally with meaning. He states that by concentrating on meaning making, psychology will be heeding the call of the wider intellectual community.

Bruner (1986) posits two forms of "knowing" that are irreducible to each other. These two modes of thought each provide unique ways of ordering experience and constructing reality. The first mode of thought is comparable to a good story and it is concerned with verisimilitude; the second is comparable to a well-formed argument and it is concerned with statements of fact which are converted into statements implying causality.

Empirical science attends to the latter mode, the "paradigmatic" or "logico-scientific" one. This research is about storytelling, a form of qualitative research that corresponds to the first mode of thought, the "narrative mode". The existential elements in the stories of the veterans necessitate the narrative mode of understanding.

Polkinghorne (1988) states there are two forms of narrative investigation. One is called "descriptive" narrative research. Descriptive research seeks to describe the narratives already held by individuals. The other is called "explanatory" narrative research. Explanatory research seeks to explain through narrative why something happened. This research proposes to conduct descriptive research. Polkinghorne (1988) characterizes the purpose of descriptive research:

> To produce an accurate description of the interpretive narrative accounts individuals or groups use to make sequences of events in their lives or organizations meaningful. This research produces a document describing the narratives held in or below awareness that make up the interpretive schemes a people or a community uses to establish the significance of past events and to anticipate the consequences of possible future actions. The research does not construct a new narrative; it merely reports already existing ones. (p. 162)

One point of disagreement with Polkinghorne concerns his statement that research does not construct a new narrative but merely reports on a preexistent one. This belief is representative of modernist approaches, where a "narrative", for instance, is "found" and reported without distortion. The postmodern alternative (i.e., social constructionism) suggests that the context of the interview (i.e., two individuals trying to arrive at shared meanings) contributes to the construction of the narrative. What is *re-collected* is, to some degree, *re-created* in each new social and temporal context. Within the dialogue, the meaning making process is interactive and generative.

The epistemological basis for choosing in-depth interviewing can be summarized in the following points. The meanings one attaches to experience are constructed through

interactions with others. The accounting of one's experience is open to constant revision. This accounting implies a social element; the need to have another bear witness to one's story. In fact, it is *in the telling* of one's story that meaning is constructed and understood. Trauma stories are accounts that have largely been silenced, unable to find an audience to bear witness. Interviewing Vietnam veterans is research that bears witness. Interviewing is research based on the narrative mode (rather than a logico-scientific mode) that seeks to describe the narrative accounts held by the Veterans. Research that bears witness through the participatory nature of dialogue (i.e., the interviews) is based on the joint creation of meaning. This is one of the cornerstones of postmodern research.

Selection of Participants

The participants will be combat Vietnam veterans. The veterans will vary in age from late thirties to late forties. They will reside in the greater Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts area. The reason for choosing this geographic area is strictly a matter of pragmatics.

I expect to find participants through informal networks of recommendations. I will enlist the help of friends and mental health professionals in finding individuals who meet the criteria for participation. I will then talk to prospective candidates on the phone or in person to determine their appropriateness for the study. At this time, the nature and purpose of the research will be informally explained. This correspondence will be followed by a letter denoting the requirements and the specifics of the study, thereby educating the participant about the nature of the their involvement and the process.

The selection process will consider two factors. The first factor is concerned with the current stability and level of functioning of the veteran. Each veteran will be warned of the possible distressing effects caused by discussing their trauma (i.e., intrusive imagery, nightmares, somatic arousal, etc.). The prospective participant will need to respond positively to questions assessing their stability, social and/or professional support network, and coping skills. As a proactive safeguard, a plan of recourse will be discussed prior to

interviewing in the event that there is an intense reaction due to the interviews. If there is doubt regarding the ability of the veteran to participate in the study and still maintain his level of functioning, the decision to protect the veteran will take precedence and the veteran will not participate in the research. The second factor deals with articulate expression of their experiences. This research will depend upon the veteran to construct and narrate his life story. An effort such as this, in the context of research, requires a certain degree of fluent expression.

The projected number of participants is six, however the final number will depend upon the breadth and depth of data generated by the interviews.

Interview Process

The interviews will be conceived as a form of discourse between speakers (Mishler, 1986). The goal of each interview is to reach a "knowing of the third kind" (Shotter, 1993). In other words, since both the interviewer and interviewee jointly contribute to the conversation, a joint negotiation of reality--the veteran's reality--is sought. The Veteran is considered the expert on himself and his narrative. The interviews are not simply viewed as "data collection." The interviews are viewed as trauma narratives being expressed in the interview context and as such, are socially constructed. My primary role in the interview is to bear witness. This includes creating a space and a process for generative dialogue.

The research design in this study is based upon Seidman's (1991) model of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing. Seidman's model is adapted to meet the distinctive characteristics of the Vietnam veteran's post-adolescent experience of war. Instead of following Seidman's three-interview structure (i.e., focused life history, the details of experience, and reflection on the meaning), a four part interview schedule will be implemented. The schedule is based on four questions which correspond to four interviews: life history prior to Vietnam, the Vietnam experience, life history since Vietnam, and anticipated sense of future and reflections on the interviewing experience. I plan to allow 90 minutes for each interview. Seidman suggests spacing each interview from

3 days to a week apart. My goal is to keep this suggested spacing while honoring the requests of the interviewees, since the interview will be an imposition upon their schedules. The pragmatics of transcription will also be a factor in the timing of interview intervals.

Bearing witness is a central theme in this research. To enhance the witnessing emphasized in the research, each veteran will read his own interview transcript prior to his subsequent interview. It is hypothesized that in reading his own story, he is witnessing his narrative from a detached position that will help him to relate to it in new ways, generating new meanings. Each interview will begin by asking the veteran what it was like to read his own interview.

The four questions and the reflective prompt which provide the format for the interviews are based on the different narrative strategies required for appropriating the past and anticipating the future (Crites, 1986). The questions ask the veteran to relate his accounting to time past and future. The nature of the veteran's relationship to time is important because when his strategies are mixed, the resulting self-narrative is confused, inconsistent, and even chaotic. If he reflects upon his past and as a result, wishes it were different, he is treating his past as if it were future. And if he anticipates his future and in doing so, assumes it will be a certain way (e.g., as if it were a recollection) he is treating his future as if it were past. Crites suggests the proper stance to take toward one's past is recollection; and towards one's future, hope[2]. The four-structure interview is sensitive to time. It allows the veteran to freely express the nature of his relationship to his past and future.

Crites' ideas are especially relevant with respect to psychological trauma. The past is often avoided by the trauma survivor (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Yet, a coherent sense of identity depends partially on recollecting the past and forming a coherent narrative based on these recollections (McAdams, 1993). The pain of past events can negatively impact the veteran's recalling his past in sufficient detail to arrive at an understanding of it. The result of disconnecting from one's past can affect one's future, or anticipation of future. A sense

of foreshortened future is common in many Vietnam veterans (Lifton, 1973). Life without hope is a common legacy for a life impacted by severe trauma.

After the four interviews have been conducted, a fifth group interview will follow that will allow for discussion about what the process of telling (and reading) their stories was like. Each veteran will have read the profiles of the other veterans *prior* to this meeting. In sharing their stories in this fashion, they are performing the role of witness; they first witness their own story and then they witness each others' stories. They will have opportunity to reflect on their experience witnessing others' stories in this final interview.

Since this study is a pilot study and the five interviews will produce enormous amounts of information, it will consist of four veterans. If one veteran drops out, two events will follow: the meaning behind the reason he chose *not* to participate will be included into the study and an alternative will replace him, keeping the number of participants at four.

The Questions

The questions address specific topics of interest to the researcher while at the same time are "stated" in such a way to preserve the *veteran's* story in *his* words. He chooses which parts of his experiences are the most salient. To accomplish this delicate balance, the questions will be woven into the context of the interviews, respecting the flow of themes and topics. Also, the initial part of each interview will be open and unstructured. It is conceivable that the areas represented by the questions will be spontaneously addressed in the dialogue. In this case, questions will not be asked since the desired material has been offered. It is only for academic purposes that the questions are listed and numbered (Appendix B). In the interviews, the joint construction of the veteran's experience in the veteran's words is given highest value. Questions will not create the story, rather they will add elaboration and fullness to it.

There are two types of questions in the interviews. The first type of questions are open-ended questions. Each interview (see Appendix B) starts with an open-ended

question. The second type of questions are prompting questions, which probe for information and concretize the meanings contained in their stories. After the interview begins with an open-ended question and the veteran has responded to his satisfaction, prompting questions flesh out the story, gathering information not spontaneously offered. Each interview has a list of prompting questions. It is anticipated that many of these prompting questions will be addressed naturally, without solicitation, in the veteran's story. Since prompting questions will be carefully woven into the context of the conversation, the wording of the prompt will be determined by the context of the dialogue and therefore may change in each interview.

Options for Interpretation and Analysis

Since the interview transcripts are viewed as speech events and jointly constructed discourse, analysis and interpretation are based on a theory of discourse and meaning (Mishler, 1986). A theory of social discourse and meaning is explicitly formulated in Siedman's (1991) analysis of narrative transcripts. Siedman suggests three steps in the analysis process: creating a profile, making thematic connections and interpreting and analyzing the material. These three steps will be incorporated into the research, with one exception, the inclusion of the veteran in the task of creating a profile.

Creating a Profile

Upon completing the four interview sequence, the tape recorded interviews will be transcribed. Once the interviews are converted into manuscripts, the next step will be to study the data and reduce it inductively. Passages in the text will be marked according to what appears important and interesting (Seidman, 1991). Since there is a degree of subjectivity in determining what gets marked, I add an extra step; I include the veteran. The veteran will read his transcript, highlighting what he finds interesting. The addition of the veteran to the marking process will result in two marked transcripts. The marked transcript of the veteran will be saved for comparison and examination at a later stage of analysis.

The designated passages from my markings are then gathered together into a shorter manuscript. This process of marking the text and combining the marked sections converts the transcript into a more concise text which can be shared or displayed. At this stage of text formation, a narrative is crafted in the participant's words. It is this narrative (or profile) that is exchanged among the participants prior to the fifth interview. In the dissertation, the participant's identity will be protected in the narrative (i.e., pseudonyms).

As mentioned, the veteran will be given his transcript to mark according to what "stands out" for him. The result of their marking will be compared and contrasted to the material I deemed significant. Speculation on the difference in markings will be provided in the analysis section. This attempt to join my efforts with the interviewee's is an attempt to be more collaborative in my research. If meanings are jointly negotiated and socially constructed, then the analysis should likewise have a *shared* quality to it.

Making Thematic Connections

Providing thematic connections is a way of presenting material by organizing excerpts from the transcripts into categories. The excerpts are those passages which have already been marked as interesting. This material will be tentatively labeled and categorized, as the interviews of each participant are studied. This process will emphasize inductive labeling which allows the categories to arise out of the passages. I will be sensitive to inevitable biases, presuppositions and prejudices throughout the categorization process.

Interpreting and Analyzing the Material

The analysis of the interview material will indirectly reply to the questions listed in the "purpose of the study" section found (Chapter 1). The reason for not responding directly to the questions is to allow for contextual meanings to emerge and be heard. The overall nature and postmodern emphasis of this dissertation does not support the use of explicitly stated, contrived analysis questions. Therefore, what is being substituted (for explicitly stated questions that are then answered) is an analysis of the interview material that occurs in successive stages, evolving in parallel fashion to the interviews themselves.

In chapter 4, what each veteran said regarding childhood, Vietnam, homecoming, expectation of future, experience of telling/reading his own story and witnessing the stories of the other participants will be described. Chapter 5 will report on the summaries of these and variations in the five interviews, according to the four veterans. The first section will address what they all said regarding their childhood and how it did or did not prepare them for Vietnam. The second section will address their experiences in Vietnam, both common experiences and differences. The third section will address their homecoming, to what extent they were able to psychologically return to civilian life, and what commonalties and differences in their experiences were. The fourth section will address the nature of their interviewing experience, including telling and reading their own story. The fifth section will address the experience of sharing and witnessing their stories (in the form of profiles) with others. This type of analysis accomplishes two results: the analysis allows for the methodology to evolve more naturally than a question-answer format, and this type of a more "open" analysis allows for greater unexpected learning to occur.

Robert Jay Lifton has studied the effects of catastrophic trauma on the survivors and perpetrators (i.e., Hiroshima, Vietnam, and the Nazi doctors). He has concluded that human beings have a "Protean" capacity which fosters resilience and allows for transformation and healing, as well "closing off' and constriction. The self "becomes an engine of symbolization as it continuously receives, re-creates, and extends all that it encounters" (1993, p. 28). Lifton states:

> I understand the self to function within a model or paradigm of life continuity, of the symbolization of life and death. In that model, at the immediate level occur struggles with connection and separation, with movement and stasis, and with integrity and disintegration. The ultimate level includes an inner sense, in the face of one's finite life span, of living on in one's children or group (the biological mode of symbolic immortality); in one's work or influence on other human beings (the creative mode); in one's spiritual principles (the religious mode); in what virtually all cultures

> symbolize as eternal nature (the natural mode); or, on a somewhat different level, through a psychic state of experiential transcendence, a form of intense or quiet ecstasy within which time and death disappear. (1993, p. 29)

The following questions based on Lifton's conceptualization of trauma provide a larger lens of analysis by which the interview material may be understood:

1. What has been the history of connection and separation, in regard to relationships, in the veteran's life? Has Vietnam affected his history?
2. What has been the history of movement and stasis, in regard to meaning making, in the Veteran's life? Has Vietnam affected his history?
3. What has been the history of integrity and disintegration, in regard to his self process/identity, in the Veteran's life? Has Vietnam affected his history?
4. On the ultimate level of life continuity (i.e., the symbolization of life and death), which of the five modes that express symbolic immortality--the biological mode, the creative mode, the religious mode, the natural mode, the transcendent mode--have been affirmed?

Limitations of the Study

This study is designed to be a preliminary investigation. It will be limited by several factors. First, the number of participants in the study will be small. This will permit a more in-depth, detailed analysis of the veterans' narratives than would be possible with a large number of participants. A small number of participant interviews are planned, leading to the co-generation of meaning in regard to the impact of their traumatic experience upon their life story. The investigation is not intended to provide generalizable results. The emphasis is on the joint construction of meaning in trauma narrative, opening up areas for further investigation accentuating postmodern methodologies. Second, no attempt is being made to represent all ethnic and cultural variations found in Vietnam veterans. Findings (i.e., stories) may not be representative of the experiences of Vietnam veterans of cultural and

ethnic heritage's other than those of the participants. Third, the participants will be volunteers who can speak articulately about their experiences and beliefs. A more random sample selection of participants might yield a greater diversity of language, stories, and themes.

CHAPTER 4

TELLING THE STORY OF THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

What the Veteran Said Regarding Childhood, Vietnam, Homecoming and Life After Vietnam

This chapter presents the profiles of Andrew, Glen, Tim and Ernie. The profiles consist of condensed versions of their interviews that have been crafted into narratives. Each profile tells the story of the participant's life in chronological order. Additional excerpts of the participants that are more reflective in nature are contained in chapter five.

Andrew

. . . Growing up I had wonderful parents [and] three older sisters whom I got along with very well. At times we argued and things, but they were normal sibling relationships. My dad was, I'd say, a wonderful man. I've come to grips with problems I had growing up with him, many years after Vietnam. I've come to grips. He's passed away; my mother [has also] passed away, recently. He was a difficult guy. He was a politician, a very well known guy. . . . Basically with my father, he was a very demanding guy. He had a path somewhat designed in his mind about what his son should do and how he should follow, and I just never went that route, I never did. Not that we didn't have this turbulent relationship, it's just that what *he* wanted, *I* didn't. And I guess I was just headstrong as a youngster and an adolescent.

. . . [I] always had good friendships, some of them very long lasting. I always considered myself a loyal friend, a loyal person.

[I] met Martha at 16 years of age as my wife. . . . We'd gone to high school together. After high school, we got married--a year after high school. I went to a state university for a year-and-a-half for that period of time.

. . . After that, my option was to go into business with my father who owned a funeral home. I was intending to do that when I finished college. And that year of college, a year-and-a-half of college, I lost three friends that Martha grew up with--that Martha and I

grew up with and hung around with--in Vietnam. The Vietnam War had hit us very closely because these were people we were with a few months before, maybe even a month before. In one case, a guy came home on leave. I had another half-a-dozen friends that were there.

I felt like I was, obviously, not going to be called because: (a) I was a parent, a married parent, and (b) I was a student. I figured that I was taking the back door. That was my perspective at the time, and I started to get very guilty about it. And the icing on the pudding was, on the Thanksgiving I came home from school, my father had announced to the whole table that I didn't have to worry about being drafted because his friend was the head of the selective service and would take care of it. And I thought to myself, "This is really crazy. What right do I have?"--considering that morning I had gone by to visit a friend's grave at the local cemetery, a good friend of Martha and mine. I made my mind up then. I had enough [time] into college to go into . . . the officer's candidate program. And I said, "I think I'll do that." And that . . . brings you right up to the time I went into the military.

. . . [I have] three older sisters, all cum laude students. [They were] perfect in every way for what my father and mother wanted. And then me, I was less than perfect. If you listen to my sisters, they'll say that the sun rose and set upon me. But if you listen to me, you won't feel it that way because he [my father] was a tough guy to please, a tough guy to get close to. I never did much with him. He would basically rather be with his friends a lot than spend time with his son. And we came to grips with this, but that's essentially how it was.

My mother was a wonderful person who stayed in his shadow most of their adult life and only blossomed . . . into a woman whom we all grew to love even more, after dad passed away because she was now, not standing in the shadows of somebody who was bigger than life.

. . . My sister Cindy, the oldest one, was the most independent. After college she decided to go to graduate school in California. My father told her not to leave the house

before she was married. That was his form of Italian dictatorship--familial dictatorship. [She] was to never come back again. He didn't lift in that light for a few years, and Sandra made him very proud. She had gone to Vietnam as a nurse. . . . She was a captain in the Air Force, and a nurse. . . . [She] finished her masters. She was assigned to Vietnam. Her husband, whom she had met in the Air Force, was a pilot. . . . They were both in [Vietnam]. First he was in Vietnam for a tour, and [then] she was in after his tour was over. . . . She went over as a civilian working for a French Catholic hospital in Saigon. This is how the life of the girls went. She was the exception because she had gone off and done a different thing. My sister Cathy, the closest one to me in age, and then my sister Veronica, [who] was the middle one in age above me, both married local guys, raised their families and still live very close. And we're a close family.

. . . I think if there was a disciplinarian, it was my father; [and] I would. . . run into that too much with him. You understand, I gave him a lot of trouble, but it was mischievous trouble. The local policeman would come home with me over his shoulder because I was out drinking in high school. But they'd do that rather than arrest me, then my father [as mayor] would owe them one. . . . [My mother] was kind of always on the kid's side, pretty much like my wife is now. I found out years later, she didn't have the nicest growing up either. . . . So I think that she was probably dealing with that in her own way. We were close, we were pretty close.

. . . My father had it kind of terrible growing up. My grandfather was a real tyrant. It was just that my father had his way of doing things. Like I say, if you talk about your whole lifetime of experiences, father and son, well we just maybe did two things together or three things together. But he was a mayor, he was building a business, he was busy. I guess that was it. It's a pretty shitty, terrible excuse, but I guess that was it--nothing else to say for him. As I say, we've made our peace. He explained his heart out, and I did the same to him.

. . . I think my father had incredible principles. [He portrayed] a sense of right and wrong and a sense of loyalty, an extreme sense of loyalty. I guess I might have gotten those [qualities] from my father [along with] a very good sense of family. And of any criticisms I've ever made of him as. . . a father, [I must also mention that] he did the best he could. He cleansed and increased and made better his portion of fatherhood . . . and I think I've done better in mine. I hope that my son will do better in his.

. . . My problems might have begun with my father . . . [as I got older]. He was clearly defined as to what he wanted me to do. He wanted me to go to college, take over his business and go directly into politics. Basically, his saying was always that, "I'll get you elected," or, "I'll have you elected," or, . . . "You don't have to go into the service because I can take care of that for you." He had a whole series of things lined up for me. Maybe [he was] living an extension of his life [through me] as you oftentimes see.

. . . I had a lot of friends. I enjoyed my post-adolescent years. . . . I wanted to be accepted, but I don't recall having any problems with that now. And with my father, what did I do? Well, I gave in to some things. I worked with him, for slave wages. . . . He loved Martha and loved the children. . . . He believed that Martha and I didn't have to be married. I think I might of believed it for a while too, but I came to another view and said, "Young or not young, this is happening."

. . . We generally ate together every night. I don't recall there being a lot of understanding from my dad [or] a lot of discussion or talk. It was like, "Do it his way," and that was that. My mother kind of backed him up on that. She was pretty much behind him, always in his shadow for a lot of years growing up.

. . . I don't remember what it felt like to be understood because I always thought I was heard. I always thought I made myself be heard. I'd be a pest growing up if I wasn't heard. If I had something to say and no one would listen, I think I would say it over again until I got someone to listen to me.

. . . Nobody has ever silenced me. That might have been a problem. If I'd learned to shut up a little more, maybe my father and I would have gotten along a lot better. This is basically what my mother would tell me. I've always said my piece; good, bad or indifferent.

[When] my father would ask me to do something, I would ask, "Why?" "Why" was a word that he grew to hate. [My father would say:] "I don't have to explain it." [I would say:] "I just want to know why." . . . I'd push him to the edge, not knowing then that he had taken quite a few beatings from his father with shoes and straps and things. I'd say that he exercised a tremendous amount of restraint with me. . . . I have more thoughts about not being heard after I came back from Vietnam than any other part of my life.

. . . There wasn't a damn thing that prepared me for Vietnam; except all the training I had, and that was a half preparation. I had more training than most American soldiers had. Nothing! Nothing can prepare you. It can condition you; it cannot prepare you. And they're two different words.

. . . My father-in-law taught me how to be good and to be secure with a compass and map when I was probably 17 years old. I used to hunt with him up on the Canadian border, a place called Pittsburgh Village that was really remote. All that was up there was St. Regis Lumber Company and the Connecticut lakes and Indian stream area--a very very remote area. If you went in off a logging road and you didn't know where the logging road was or how to read a map, you could get lost in there. You could get lost and die in there (and people did). So I had a tremendous advantage, tremendous advantage. I was very comfortable with a map and a compass and my own ability to navigate. I never believed there would be such a test as Vietnam because . . . part of the second tour in Laos was basically in triple canopy jungle, and it was the most difficult, the biggest test for land navigation. That's what I think [prepared me]. There were no psychological things that prepared me.

. . . If I didn't have those basics--loyalty, the principles of what's right and wrong--if I didn't have those instilled in me, I might have acted differently in Vietnam. I might not have cared as much as I care about people that I watched die. . . . And [as for] my character, I think character is formed in somebody at a young age. I think it is. I think other things help fine tune and trowel it, if you will.

. . . He [my father] had a great respect for the military, a great respect for soldiers. . . . I perceived that by watching what he did during the Korean War. For instance, he dedicated different areas and buildings to Korean War vets. I have a picture of him. . . dedicating the park to the first W.W.II vet that was killed in action from our home town. The veterans always supported him in his elections. . . . You are talking about a guy who wasn't experienced in that [war]. I think he thought it might be terrible, but I don't think he knew, I don't think he knew. I think it took him a lot of years afterwards to realize how bad it was. He just wanted it to be different when I came home. He wanted me to pick up where I left off. I mean, he nearly insisted upon it.

. . . I thought it [preconceived notions of war] was easier and less bloody. I thought it would be like watching the movies, seeing John Wayne and watching people die on the big screen. It ain't the same. Everyone just falls down and dies peacefully. It's not the same. There's nothing in any of those that shows enough about fear on the face of people; fear before, after, during; fear of what's going to happen. Just controlling your fears is what makes you survive, if you're lucky. That's fate.

. . . It [Vietnam] changed my whole life. I was a young guy, and there was a war going on; and I thought that I belonged there. A lot of my thinking, I didn't realize until I was in Country, was a bit naive. But nevertheless, I'd probably do a lot of the same things again because I believed in what I was doing. [I] believed what I was doing was right. At least in the beginning, I believed whole-heartedly what we were doing was right.

. . . As time went on, I got to see the futility of some things that we did. We lost lives with no change. . . . [In] the first tour, I can't tell you that I had any major revelations

there. I can tell you [that in] the second tour I did. In MAC-SOG, we did long-range reconnaissance work that affected strategic intelligence gathering out of Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam--the southern section of North Vietnam. For instance, we saw during the bombing halt in '69 and '70, the Christmas cease fire, that they tripled the amount of barges down the Song he Cong River. We did barge watch, or river watch. . . . On the highways that ran North and South through Laos and into Cambodia, highways 13 and 19, . . . [we saw] the truck traffic on those roads triple. The troop traffic along the roads, and through the trails that made up the Ho Che Minh Trail network, doubled and tripled every reconnaissance team. We lost whole reconnaissance teams because there was so much activity in the area.

Three or four months before, while the bombing was going on, the activity in the area was so light that you could actually go into some areas and not see anybody for three days. . . . You *might* hear people and trucks as you approach the road, but you would inevitably [come into contact with them] during the Christmas cease fire. Every time we were inserted into the area, every reconnaissance team, with the exception of a few during those missions, was shot out (by that meaning that the first insertion was no go). They had to pick an alternate [route], go into a secondary insertion zone; or they could chase to the LZ [landing zone], get out by their skin of their teeth, or didn't get out!

. . . They had this intelligence [throughout the] day and night. I know because when I was not in the bush, every reconnaissance team had to go to *every* evening debriefing, *every* evening meeting, every one. . . . It was the same for every team. Every team in command control central area, which was Laos, had either been in contact, got into a hot LZ and broke contact, got into a hot LZ and then pulled out and was then put into another LZ, or they were up to shit up to their eyeballs. It was a terrible time. . . . Nothing was done about it.

. . . The RECON [reconnaissance] team members were bitter; we were bitter. I mean after a week of this, there should have been arc-lights called every day, every day and

every night. There should have been arc-lights along the Song he Cong River, along the two highways, and along the major passage-trail networks. . . . They should have been arc-lighted [because] they were staging areas. People were running into battalion base camps. [There were] RECON teams where there were soldiers walking around with clean uniforms. That indicates--they had haircuts and clean uniforms--they are fresh troops. These aren't people who just came back with battered uniforms and looked somewhat emaciated because they hadn't had a good diet. These are people who came down from the North during the Christmas cease fire and were staging to go South. . . . And with each team that went in, the fear factor went up more and more.

We suffered more casualties in that month-and-a-half time than we did in the two or three months previous to that, and nothing was changed. Nothing was changed! We didn't--because of politics--we didn't continue the bombing [during the Christmas cease fire], and we should have. I mean, you either fight the war to win the war and bring the people that are fighting the war home, or you get out of there! Or you stop doing the futile effort . . . that just gets more people killed on both sides. You either fight it to win it, or you get the hell out of it! . . . You ran into so much opposition . . . [that] what was a dangerous job became almost suicidal. Look, it was suicidal because it increased so much, and we didn't do a damn thing about it. Nothing!

[In] my first tour, I was the executive officer of Dakto Special Forces Camp. I thought that was a good tour. . . . Dakto was overrun once. It wasn't overrun in the period I was there, although we were attacked twice, I mean for like two or three days at a time. . . . So it was exciting; it was somewhat rewarding. It was big-time a lot boring with islands of extreme terror for a few days at a time. . . . [At Dakto], these [patrols] were patrols in force; they were large, they made a lot of noise [and] there were a lot of people. We often wondered . . . what would happen if we caught the level of our troops--if we caught a

company of NVA face-to-face with us. But it never happened because they didn't fight the same way.

. . . When I was in that camp, about a kilometer-and-a-half away, there was another hill [or] hilltop. That hilltop had perforated aluminum plate or a perforated steel plate runway on top of it (actually a chopper pad not a runway) and a bunker. And I used to watch helicopters with no markings landing there during the days (only during the days was this hilltop operating). When I questioned as to what was going on over there . . . I was briefed that it was the launch site for a special operation. Period. End. That was it. And we're only a kilometer-and-a-half away and could be a back up if they were ever attacked. That hilltop was never attacked. . . . In the morning at first light, helicopters would come in and people would man it. During the day at some time, they would build an asset tree out there. By that I mean . . . helicopter gunships would show up; there would be ten. A covey-rider would show up and circle. Troops would be brought in on two or three slicks, usually two slick ships; and a third slick, which is called a chase medic ship, would come in. They'd spend some time at the launch site. Sometimes they'd spend all day at the launch site. We didn't know at the time exactly what they were doing and . . . they were pretty good about keeping it away from us. Only on a couple of occasions--when they had to come to our camp . . . [because] they were . . . so weathered in that they weren't going to be able to get back to Kontum--they came to our camp and stayed with us.

Then I ran into a guy I went through special forces officers school with, and he let me--against all rules--understand, by letting me in on what was going on. They were launching over-the-border operations into Laos from that site [which] was called Launch Site I, from Forward Operational Base II, which was Kontum. . . . [It was] long-range reconnaissance work and it, and it got me. It was tremendously interesting, tremendously interesting. Yes, it was dangerous; the casualty rate was like 30% which was really very high. But the stuff they were doing was great to me.

And here I am, figuring out that basically, if I'm not in the bush, I'm kind of bored. . . . You've got to be there to understand it. There's a lot of time that you sit there and you *wonder* if you're going to be attacked. There's a lot of time you stay awake and *wonder* if something's going to happen, *wonder* if you've done all the right things--if you've done all the right things to make sure the camp's secure so that things don't happen. After you go through a week or two of that, you get lax. . . . When you start to drop your guard, you have problems. *That's* the time when you're going to get attacked, but it was mostly waiting to be attacked if you weren't on a patrol. But these guys never waited. They went out and did it! Their mission was totally different. So I got close to the end of my tour, and I asked for a transfer to MAC-SOG.

When I got to MAC-SOG, Douglas was another training officer, and the first thing he said to me was, "What are you doing here?" He said, "You had a pretty good job in A-Camp. What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm here because it's what I want to do." And I think the last thing he said to me--and I didn't see him after that day, I never saw him again after that, he rotated home--he said to me, "You're the hardest-headed 'ginny' that I've ever known in my life." And he was right; he was right. There but for the grace of God go I. I should have come home, after that first tour, back to my family. [I should have] tried to just pick up everything there [back home with family]. It would have made my whole life easier.

. . . I've always been someone who sought excitement. I've always tried to push the envelope a little bit by myself. Well I pushed the hell out of it that time, I tell you. Once I was there, once I had gone through Long Thonh Long-Range Reconnaissance Team Leader School, and got to Command and Control Central FOB2, and met the other RECON teams, I knew I was in the right place. I was home. I was home. They were unbelievably professional. It was the closest knit group of people I have worked with in my life. And I have to say that they endured some of the most violent hardships as human beings I could ever image. Everybody in Vietnam did! . . . We were just a smaller group

with across-the-board higher casualties because of the area we were in. But that's not to say that we suffered anymore than anyone else because of what we did.

. . . The intelligence gathering community was so hot to get intelligence, our intelligence, that no matter what the cost was, we were to try to break contact and continue the mission. [That was] no good [and] very hard to do. . . . At the same time you [would] give up 10 people . . . you would not violate--because of political reasons--Christmas cease fire . . . [even though] the area is completely *saturated* with North Vietnamese violating it.

How do you tell these people that are going in and risking their lives, "Break contact. Continue mission." Everywhere you turn, you're running into the bad guys. . . . I noticed that that was pretty much when I became . . . awake to what was really going on, and it was tough. I didn't want to lose anybody. . . . I didn't want to die myself, but I really did not want to lose anybody else because I had gone through that; I had lost three people before that. They'd broken up one team completely [because] everybody in the team was either killed or wounded, and that was it for the team. The team was disbanded and nobody else . . . ever got that name again. . . . I've been through that. I had gone through it, and I didn't want to do it again. So my attitude changed.

. . . [If] you have a RECON team with eight people and you have two people wounded, you are screwed. It takes two people to carry one person, [so] you are screwed. That's five people that cannot shoot fire and maneuver and help break contact. The only thing you can do is suck it up. The wounded people have to keep moving and keep firing. And if you get somebody critically wounded, it's simple: we ain't leaving them. . . . Then you call the Prairie Fire Emergency, and you hope to hell that somebody listens to you in the *right* way. [You hope that someone] gets you help in there and gets you out of there because if they don't, you're not leaving, you're not going to leave! We didn't leave Americans, and we didn't even leave Montengards.

. . . [There are] two dreams that probably have plagued me for the last eight years. I went sixteen years without nightmares and dreams. Occasionally, I would have a dream

of something that was related to [Vietnam, but] . . . it didn't really happen. It was just an instance of something that happened, and then there'd be somebody else in it. That's a dream. To me that's a dream, and you can get over it because it's not real. You just had an image of something that happened in Vietnam coupled with something at a football game, or something else totally unreal. You don't dwell on it. It's just something upsetting. [You then] get up and go to bed. I had those. Not anything big [although] a little uncomfortable.

What would happen to me was in '86, prior to the time I was hospitalized, I started having nightmares . . . that repeated themselves over and over. The worst one I still have. I'm able to deal with it better since being hospitalized. I'm able to deal with it because of some good care I got.

But as far as images . . . I killed a little girl in Laos and that's the image that comes back, as recently as a few nights ago. We had the team in Tcepone Valley, Laos. That was a pretty active area. We came into this area, and we were walking. I say "walking," [I mean] stop-look-and-listen walking, along the dry creek bed. There was a trail up above us about ten feet higher than us. We had gone up to the trail and checked it out. It was not heavily used, so I decided to continue on the creek bed because it paralleled the trail and just see what we could see. And we were also marking the trail, and we were also marking the outside limits of a battalion-size rest area. . . . We were on one side of it, and another RECON Team was on the other side, about two kilometers southwest of us. We were trying to get the limits of this. It was unoccupied at the time, and we were trying to get the outside parameter of this on the map so that when it was occupied, . . . we could utilize arc-lights and B52 strikes on it. Nobody wanted to do that until it was occupied, which made good sense. Therefore, we were told not to go into the camp which was pretty much deserted. We could hear chopping, and we could smell cooking fires for one or two of the days that we were in the area, but we never ran into anybody. So it was pretty much a dry hole in that respect, but we were getting good intelligence out of it.

We had followed this creek bed, and the trail paralleled it, and I saw--actually the pointman saw him first--a North Vietnamese soldier coming down the trail above us. [He was moving] away from us. He turned to me just at the time I saw him, and I put everybody in a hasty ambush position. I gave the rights, the hand signal for it. I didn't have time to do it the way I wanted to. There were two North Vietnamese soldiers and a Palhet Indian, [or at least] that's what I saw; shoulders up, three males passing. There was a North Vietnamese Lieutenant [who] had a pith helmet on. There was a North Vietnamese NCO--or I'm not even sure if there was an NCO at this time--but he had a soft canvas hat on. He had a backpack with a spool of commo wire on it, and he was stringing wire, communications wire. So there were the three of them.

As they came down, we set up a hasty ambush, and we sprung the ambush on them. I only did that for one reason. It was the last day of the mission, and I figured we had an opportunity to take one of them alive as a prisoner. That's the only reason I did it. Other than that, we were sat back, and we would have let them go by. So we sprung the ambush. If I'd have had time to plan it, I would have done a few things differently. For instance, I wouldn't have let the tail gunner, who had an M79, fire. But I didn't have that time; I only had 15 seconds. The firing only went on for another 20 seconds, maybe. I ran up to the trail . . . to see if one was alive to snatch him as a prisoner, . . . and if he wasn't, I wanted to grab whatever I could out of the rucksacks (intelligence), get the hell out of there, and call the helicopters because we're on our way out.

When I got up there, the North Vietnamese guy with the backpack on, the one I couldn't remember as an NCO or not, was dead. The North Vietnamese Lieutenant was dead. The Palhet Lao Indian was dead. Under the Palhet Indian, and off to the side of the trail in the thick brush where he ended up, was a pair of feet sticking out from under him.

You've got to understand first off, my main concern was getting the hell out of there. We haven't heard anybody. . . . If there's commo group laying wire, there's other troops at the other end of that wire. Nobody's alive. What I would have done normally,

would be to grab the rucksack off the Lieutenant, grab whatever I could off the other NVA, and get the hell out of there.

But I stopped when I saw the feet, the legs, sticking out from under this guy, the Indian. I rolled him over and it was a young girl stuck in the bushes under him. So I dragged her out and turned her around; and she was still alive. She had on . . . rubber sandals, and she had a little wrap-around thing--I forget what they call them--around her waist. Her right leg was connected by what looked like tendons. The femur bone was shattered. She had shrapnel wounds all over, I assume from the M79. And it almost looked like an M79 hit her in the chest because her sternum bone, a piece of it, was missing. I could see. . . what covers [her heart]; there's a membrane that covers your heart. I could actually see that, and it was moving; and she was still alive. . . . I kind of was . . . stopped for a second. Scared as I was, and as much as I wanted to get everybody going and get the hell out of there, I was stopped for a while. Then, I just snapped out of it. We took off up the trail, and we did the normal immediate action drill where two guys stayed slack watch; [they] watch for either side of the trail and then they both fell in behind us.

And I stopped, maybe 50 feet back into the jungle, and I turned around and ran back up on the trail. I put the gun to her head, and I, and I shot her in the head. I listened. . . . It didn't bother me that I did that because I'm a smart enough guy to know that I did the humane thing. I'm a smart enough guy to know if I was that way, I'd want somebody to do it to me. It's just the action of doing it. It's just the action and the picture in my mind. It's just her head flattening out when the round hit her. It just kind of flattened out. And that's where the dream starts. It starts with me running back, and it stops there. Nothing else! Nothing else, not even finding the body. It starts with me running back, and it stops with me looking at her.

. . . What I did was, in some ways, irresponsible to my men. I had a responsibility; they rely on me, I rely on them. But I just couldn't take another step

without doing that. . . . I just wish it didn't happen. . . . Most of all, if it happened today and the situation was the same, I would have done the same; but I wish I just didn't have to have the dream anymore. I just wish I could get rid of that [dream].

And there're other instances. I used to wake up once in a while dreaming of this: [I] was on a river watch . . . on the Song he Cong River. We had been rained on for about four days and nights; everybody was sick. The mission should have gone on another three days, [but] it never would of [made it]. Everyone was sick. [With] the Montengards, I was putting gravatte bandages in their mouth at night so they wouldn't cough. When they would, I could hear them, or Jack could hear them quick enough to get a hand over their mouth. There was all kinds of activity below us and behind us, up on the cliff where we were.

. . . In back of where we were, we had North Vietnamese moving. We didn't want to move. We didn't want to move. . . . Anywhere we moved would be trouble for us! Helicopters were in-bound--this was the fifth day of the mission now; four days we were rained on--helicopters are in-bound because the situation is bad for us. We're all sick. I mean sick to the point that we're going to get caught. Montengards have no resistance. They have no strength; they have tapped out. There's no such thing as a running fire fight; they were *that* sick.

. . . I knew that we were going to get off this hill back out to an area where we had picked as the primary extraction site. Before we left, I was so sick of seeing these barges coming by with all these supplies on them, I gave everybody one chance. Let's just pick one out, pick one [barge] out, with the most troops on it and just give them a good hosing before we leave. Probably fifteen minutes after we made that decision, a barge came around the bend with no other barges around it, with nobody in front of it and nobody behind it. [There was just] one barge with about ten people on both sides of the shore, using sticks and ropes to pull it along. And [there were] about six or seven people on the barge with stacks of ammunition--what I believed was ammunition--and bags of rice, or

food. There were canvas bags. So I gave them the word and we "lit 'em up." We gave them a "mad minute." We gave them thirty seconds of extreme "rock and roll."--everything we had, one quick volley of everything we had. Everybody put a clip into the barge. The M-79er put three or four rounds in, and we threw some frags down in there. We screwed them up really good and proceeded to leave.

For the next twenty minutes of climbing and getting out of there, I did nothing but hear a guy scream. I mean when we started to leave, he was screaming and he was holding his stomach. He was jumping up and down on this thing. I guess he was shot in the stomach, but whatever hit him I don't know. I tried three or four times to get him . . . because . . . the screams were *so loud*. . . . I really wanted to kill him, [but] he just jumped around too much. And for the rest of the time climbing out of that place, all you could hear was this guy's screams echoing through that whole area . . . [that was] like shale and granite cliff on either side of the area. We managed to get extracted, without incident--without any further incident. There have been a lot of times when I wake up because I either go through that in my mind, or I just hear his screams.

There were more [recollections that are distressing], but I don't think they have a hold on me anymore. The one with the girl, if anything, has a hold on me. That's the one that still gets me when I'm sleeping . . . maybe because I had two young girls myself. I had one at the time. I don't know. . . . At some point it just got worse, it just got much, much worse! I was watching my daughter grow up and thinking to myself--this is mostly with my youngest daughter, Natalie--watching her grow up and thinking to myself that there's a balance of payment somewhere. I felt the same way with Catherine when she was growing up. I'm sure things haven't been easy for either of them having me as a dad. They might say differently, but I don't want anything to happen to either one of them.

My therapist says, [I'm] kind of stuck on it. [I'm] kind of stuck in that. I've got to put it the way it is. . . . I lost 40 pounds before I was hospitalized, and I was afraid to sleep at night for fear of getting stuck in this dream again--either one of them, but it was mostly

the one about the girl. And then I had a dream about . . . [when] I shot the jaw off--I don't want to dig that up again. That's just a visual thing, pretty ugly, pretty ugly. A lot of it is pretty ugly. . . . You've got to take it in bits when it happens; you've got to take it in bits. You can't open your eyes to the whole thing--open your mind to the whole thing, you know.

And then after this, to come home--and realize that you were very important there, . . . you *were* important to yourself, and you were important to the other people that were with you--and then you come home and people want you to be what you were before you left. Well, you left as a young kid, and you came back as a goddamn old man with a young kid's body, if you were lucky! You, *you* don't come back.

You don't relate to your friends. I had a friend of mine . . . this was the guy who was in the Navy. . . . He said, the very first time I saw him, "Nice to have you home, how many did you kill?" It's something like you see in a movie about somebody tastelessly saying something to someone else. I might have expected that from guys who were *with* me over there, when it was happening, but I just didn't expect that in this surrounding. I guess I wanted to forget it, I guess I did. I was really upset when he said that. I told him, "You've never been in the bush in the whole tour you were there." I said, "You've never killed anybody or you wouldn't talk like that. You wouldn't talk like that." But you know, I was wrong, and he *might* talk like that; it's just a different perception of things. He and I worked that out years ago, but I felt like I couldn't bring it up. I didn't feel comfortable talking to anybody about it, and I didn't for years. That's probably what led to my brief decline. I say "brief" because I consider myself very fortunate to have, I think, a fairly good grip on life right now.

. . . I got to believe that in most cases, the chance of being a casualty was greater in MAC-SOG, much greater; but to be an infantry platoon leader--for a young second Lieutenant to try and lead a platoon of people--I mean it's just too much. It's the most difficult job in the military because you have all the chance in the world of making mistakes

where people are going to get killed. Sure we had that in MAC-SOG and in Special Forces, but you work with a small group of people who are extremely professional. I couldn't think of anything worse than being a platoon leader in an infantry unit, of being newly assigned to an infantry combat unit. I'm fortunate with the people I worked with. For the most part I loved them all. I mean they were unbelievable.

. . . The person I was before I went, [and] the character I believe I have, I had *before* I went. The level of loyalty I have to those I care about was a result of being there. The appreciation I have for every day of life is clearly a result of being there. The pain and baggage I carry with me is a result of being there.

What my family has gone through by having me as a husband and father is a great deal the result of my being there. There were a lot of years that weren't easy for them. I love them dearly, and they're the most important things in my life; but . . . they are casualties of Vietnam without a question; they're survivors of it. I've learned--it took a long time--my baggage shouldn't necessarily be theirs. And I think for learning that, I'm a better person, much better person. I know I'm a better husband.

. . . I came back from Vietnam, and I spent two weeks in the hospital. I came back to work, and my father said to me, "Look I need you to work tomorrow." I said, "No, I haven't spent anytime with my wife or my daughter or my son." I said, "Do you know where I've been? Do you have any idea. Do you have any idea? I need some time." [He said], "But I'm very busy; I could really use you tomorrow morning." I went to work that next day, and about a week went by. Then I took off for a few days from there. But that was it, just a few days and back to work.

. . . So I went back to work; I went back to my life. I tried to start again. I didn't know that I was trying to do anything; I was just doing what was normal--what I thought was normal to me. I didn't talk about Vietnam. I didn't relate to it with anybody, just thought about it, occasionally. My wife knew not to do certain things, like wake me, like shake me to wake me, like make noises when I'm sleeping. She knew damn well not to do

those because a couple of times it was kind of ugly. Let me just say, that I went . . . and I built a business. I raised my children--not without incident, not without incident--but I did this, *with my wife.*

We spent some years separated, which is kind of a dark period in my life because I really do love her, and she's my best friend. But we've gone by that. I'm sorry that I missed those years, but I can't do anything about it. I can only take care of what's happening now. . . . I think it's fool-hearty to be thinking about yesterday, to be dwelling on the time we were separated. I made my feelings known to my children and my wife that I wish it didn't happen. . . . [although] the end result was pain for everybody. But it probably was the best thing because for so many of us Vietnam veterans, the marriage that they had prior to Vietnam . . . [is no longer]; they aren't together [anymore]. Maybe Martha and I were always meant to be together. I certainly hope so, and I think so because I'm a very, very fortunate person. My young-adult children and Martha have put up with a lot by having a husband that's a Vietnam veteran. And I understand what other families go through.

So . . . I try not to dwell on what happened before, but it changed everything. It changed everything. Going right back to work was the worst thing I could have done. . . . I spent a long time after that having no effects, I believed, from Vietnam. I lived kind of anti-socially, behaviorally, but I didn't see that I was having any trouble. It wasn't until probably 17 years *after* Vietnam that I started to have, what I call, night-time flashbacks. I started to get increasingly depressed because I thought I was losing my mind. Then I started with the weight loss [and] not wanting to sleep at night.

. . . Nobody anywhere, at anytime, ever has the right to criticize what we did in Vietnam--anyone of us, all of us as a group. Nobody has the right to criticize what we did in Vietnam *unless* they had a pair of boots on and a rucksack on their back. And that's it. There are things I'm not overwhelmingly proud of, but I'm proud of the people I was with. I'm proud of *nearly* everything I did. Some things I just don't want to think about because

war is not all [about] beating your chest and saying, "Yes, we did it! We went over there and did it!" For the people that do it [fight the wars], they carry the baggage with them about the ugly side of it. And that's all.

. . . I think I might not have talked about it for a while when I came back for those years. . . because I felt some bad feelings, like people used to say, "vibes" from people. And I think that maybe I thought I would not be able to control myself if somebody said to me, "We shouldn't have been there," or "We shouldn't have done that." I never had it said to me because I don't think I opened the conversation up enough to ever have it said. I don't know what I would have done because the memory [of those who died and] the value of the lives that were lost might have [caused me to] respond in more than [just] an antagonistic manner. . . . I'm glad I don't have to live with the feeling that I might have done something I shouldn't have . . . at the time. I don't know. But no one has the right to criticize unless you walk in their shoes.

. . . Difficult [referring to a question about what is was like returning home from Vietnam]. I came home, spent some time in the hospital, got out [of the hospital], [and] my father came and told me he wanted me to go to work the very next day. I told him that I had not spent any time with my wife and family since a thirty day leave, nearly eleven months before. I said that I think I need to take my wife away and spend some time [with her]. He said, "I really could use you. I'm really busy, could you come in and help me?" I don't know if it was my father trying to figure if it was a way to get his son back, to get back into the swing of things.

. . . It was a difficult period because, I think a lot of people that cared about Vietnam vets wanted *them,* meaning the veteran, to get on with their life as soon as they got back, so they wouldn't have to dwell on what they went through there. Nobody knew that dwelling on it could be a *saving* experience. Notice I don't say, "healthy," but "*saving*" experience because we know now, as a society, that you help somebody who goes through

trauma *immediately*. [By doing so], you make their road much clearer and much more peaceful.

. . . Understanding [is what I needed most upon returning from Vietnam]! No! [I didn't get the understanding that I needed.] I think that I needed understanding, and I needed to talk about it. But I didn't want to talk about it because I didn't figure that I could find any people that were worthy of talking about it [with], because they didn't understand. They didn't *act* like they understood. I even had people who were friends of mine, . . .-- that I knew were against the war--that I didn't want to talk to for fear that they would say something to me *against* the war, and I would hurt them [for saying it]. It's not like I would embarrass them or would be rude to them; [instead,] I would frikin hurt them because of the stomping on the graves of other people that were probably worth a lot more!

. . . You see, I don't know anybody that won't tell you this. . . . You had to change gears in such a violent fashion, or in such a large fashion. . . . And by that I mean, what we were in Vietnam; I don't care if you were an infantryman or you were in the 82nd Airborne or in the Marines. I don't care. It's not important. What you were is somebody who had an awesome amount of power. [You were] someone who was important to those people around you and extremely important to yourself. I can only apply it to what I did, to where I was. A lot of people might have different views. . . . My feeling is that it was an experience where I don't think I could have ever felt more important in my life. And [then] to come home, go back to work and be a regular person again, was a let down! There's no question [that] I felt like I belonged there. And I missed the people there. . . . And [of course] there's a lot of things I didn't miss about it.

. . . I mean if wanted to bullshit them and tell them I played in the band, they might have listened to it [my Vietnam experience]. For some reason I had, as Martha said, . . . a strange look when I came home, which I think a lot of guys had, [too]: that "thousand-yard stare". Your eyes [were] sunken into your head somewhat, and small things don't matter to you. You get very focused on things that do matter to you. . . . I just didn't feel like

anybody wanted to listen, and I don't know if I would have talked, to be honest with you. I just don't know if I was ready. I don't know what would have made me [talk]. I went to the VFW and American Legion when I came back. There was no Vietnam Veterans post when I came back. And, you know, guys sit around the bar and tell war stories and stuff, and get loaded. I spent some time there and said, "You know, I'll never go back, never go back." It was a long time before I talked about it.

. . . I think Martha did [try to listen to my Vietnam experience]. . . . There were some that might have tried. I think my family did. I think my mother and father's way of doing it, their way of dealing with it, was to *not* encourage talk about it. And maybe . . . I sent forth that message without knowing it. I can't tell you.

. . . I don't think I wanted to talk about it. . . . Who knows? If somebody had let me know that they had a ready ear, and they would listen unjudgmentally, I might have changed my mind. I really can't say having not been there in that particular instance. But when I began to have trouble with it all, in the eighties, I had people that listened. Not a lot I confided in, but people that listened.

. . . It's my own, and it's my problem. I don't need to give it to my wife, and I did. I did for a year before I went into the hospital. She shared it, and it wasn't her baggage. I think that it made it easier after that period of time in the hospital to talk about it. I still don't talk about it outside of the place where I should talk about it. . . . I didn't know it. I didn't know it. I think down deep I wanted Martha to understand me and give me the space I needed, . . . but I didn't want to come across with telling her anything that was bothering me. After the hospital, it was a little easier to talk about it. But you know, it's not something you sit down and talk about. And it's *not* something you sit and have a few beers and talk to somebody about. That's bullshit. . . . You just put it where it belongs, and you drive on; or, you can get stuck in it for the rest of your life.

. . . Basically, it [talking about Vietnam with other vets] depended on if I was drinking or if I had been in that mood. . . . But I just didn't feel like talking about it to any

extent. I think . . . the thing that happened to me with that little girl, I don't think I wanted to discuss that with anyone until the nightmare of it got so bad that I lost all that weight and ended up hospitalized. [I thought,] "Well, what am I going to the hospital for? Sorry, I don't know where the dream starts and ends and where my life starts and ends." So you have to talk about it then, because that's a problem.

. . . Well, [for] my family members, I was home for four years and left for eight. Martha and I were separated for eight years. . . . I figured I had some wild oats left to sow. This is one Special Forces guy that didn't want to be sitting in the house eating pizza on Friday night. I wanted to get *out there*. There was something out there worth seeing or doing. . . . Frankly, there was nothing out there worth seeing or doing, but you couldn't hold me back. *No one* could have held me back. And she put up with what she could, and then we separated.

. . . My sisters, when they noticed that I was kind of like slipping off the face of the earth there, in the late eighties, they all came together on it. They've talked to me since then, that maybe they should have listened more. . . . I don't hold any grudges. They did what they thought was best, and I did what I thought was best: to shut my mouth and continue on. So, am I bitter? I don't know. I think the bitterness is kind of gone out of me. I'm *upset*.

I'm upset, and I have to say that because of Vietnam . . . the Gulf War vets got *such* a welcome home party; *such* people welcoming them home. We were responsible for that, there's no question, because they turned on us! They really did turn on us, and we were the people that shouldn't have been turned on. . . . It shouldn't have happened that way. . . . If anybody asks me about it though, I always say I'm real happy for them. I say, "This is great, look at this. They know that somebody appreciated what they did [and] the shit they put up with," even though it was small shit. I shouldn't say that because people died there, but--yes I *should* say it because that's the way I feel. Martha's uncle was watching it [the returning of Gulf War veterans] with me, and he said, "Boy, this is

something, huh?" And I said, "Yeah, you had a party too when you came home from W.W.II didn't you?" He said, "Oh, it was unbelievable, unbelievable! Women [were] hugging you and kissing you in the streets," . . . [He was] a young guy in the Navy. I said, "Oh, we had a party too . . . at the local bar. Everybody asked you to take the uniform off and put your street clothes on and have a beer." I watched [the Gulf War Vets returning with him], and he said, "That's good though, isn't that good?" In my heart, I didn't want to make him feel bad, but [at the same time] I was . . . [feeling] ten times worse than before. I was lying when I saying, "Hey, this is good. We did this. This is a reason to have it. The reason they're having the party is good with us." I was saying this to Martha's uncle and the whole time, inside, it was really bothering me. I'm not lying when I say it, but at that moment it was really not the most important thing they were having. The most important thing to me was that they had said "screw us" when we came home.

. . . But understand, I never had anyone spit at me because I'd die trying to kill them, if I didn't [kill them]. That would be a fact, that would be a fact today. I never had anybody call me "baby killer,"--especially in the sensitivity of that issue--[or] they had better find a new Country to live in! It doesn't matter, in that situation, whether you win or lose. What matters is that you maintain your dignity and do what you feel is right. I just never had that happen.

. . . The last time I came back, I was carrying an SKS rifle with a Walters PP under my tunic. I don't know if anybody would have wanted to approach me in the airport. And [there was] a pig-sticker bayonet on the SKS. My mother, Martha, my daughter Natalie and son Winston, and my father--they are all waiting to meet me and they see me coming off the plane with this rifle.

. . . [I'm coping] better than I could four or five years ago. I just went through that bad time. It's a pretty tough thing to isolate yourself for a month because you can't tell where reality is; [it's pretty tough] when . . . you can't tell where the sink holes are in your

life. No matter what happens, everyday it's getting worse. You don't want to get out of bed. You don't want to talk to people. You don't want to answer the phone. You don't want to see people. You have no interest in eating. You have no interest in making love to your wife; you have no interest in doing anything. It's a pretty rude awakening! I think I've got a much better grip on it today than I did then.

. . . I didn't think suicide was an option for me. I lost forty pounds in the end, before I was hospitalized. And for me, that was a lot. But I really have to tell you, I never thought of eating a bullet; I never thought of it. I know guys who have, and I know guys who've pulled the trigger. And that's okay; if it's okay for them, then it's okay. It's not okay for their families and the people they leave behind wondering, "What could I have done to help him or her?"--leaving them back with all of that guilt trip. But if they're in that much pain . . . and that's how they want it to end--I don't agree with it--but I damn sure don't criticize it because I've been close.

. . . The experiences that a nineteen-year-old or a twenty-year-old goes through, you're not going to find in this country. You're not going to find it deer hunting. You aren't going to find it playing soccer; [and] you aren't going to find it working for General Motors. They're violent. [They are] oftentimes limit-pushing; [you are] more than often--almost continually--pushing yourself to the limit, dealing with situations where you could die anytime. I don't care if a guy was a clerk in Da Nang; it's still not home. It's totally different! It's a young kid someplace where a 122mm rocket can vaporize him! I mean, everyday places got rocketed. Everyday, people had attacks. Yes, there were safer jobs, much safer jobs, but there was no job that was absolutely 100% secure and safe so you knew you were coming home. That's why you shouldn't and can't differentiate like that.

. . . What about the guys, the twenty-year-old kids, who came back [but] had nothing when they went in? What did Uncle Sam do for them? Train them? Train them to what? Have you seen any job applications or job requests for jungle fighters, pointmen, tailgunners?--not unless you're living in Africa and there are tribal clashes going on. . . .

You came back as an old man, oftentimes without a vocation, and you have to try to fit back in. I had something to go back into, I was lucky. I was lucky. It also gave me some focus to give me some years without any problems.

. . . There's a sense that there are people in the Veteran's Administration that think we are all either drug addicts, alcoholics or fighting to overcome either one of those. A few of us are in-between; and if they are in-between, they are never heard of. . . . I think that a lot of that came from the fact that we were treated kind of shitty by the Veteran's Administration. We made it worse because we were untrusting of anything from the government. We were tough patients; we were *tough* patients. We kind of made our bed, in a lot of ways. We didn't like the way it looked, and we'd say, "Screw you," and walk out the door. So consequently, more than any other war, the Veteran's Administration began treating Vietnam Veterans with massive dosages of tranquilizers [and] antidepressants. And [there are] a whole lot of Vietnam veterans that were being quieted by the use of a pill--that were being managed by the use of a pill. I don't think that's so now. I think there's a much better grip on it. A lot of guys fell between the cracks because they were medicated.

. . . I went in [to the VA] after I got out of the hospital to get a prescription filled. It basically is a meaningless appointment; they don't have the time to see you to talk to you about what's bothering you. What they do have the time for, however, is to write you a prescription. So I went in, and I had to get a prescription for Ativan or sleeping pills, I can't remember what they were. . . . The psychiatrist was coming back at 1 o'clock, and I was his first appointment. Another guy, a vet, came and was pacing all over the office. He said he was out of medication and he couldn't stand it. This guy was making me sick, looking at him. Maybe he shouldn't have been on medication, but you see I'm not a doctor; I don't know. I keep thinking to myself that a lot of people are medicated and are given medication just to shut them up. Well this guy was just coming apart at the seams. The doctor came back an hour late and asked for me. I said, "Why don't you take this guy

first?" I said, "I think he needs to be seen." He said, "Thank you very much for your suggestion, but I will see you right now." So I walked in, and I sat down and said, "Look, I wasn't being a smart ass. The guy really looked like he needed to have your help." He said, "*I* decide when I see someone and whom I see. Doesn't that make sense to you?" I said, "No, I think you made the wrong decision. But we don't need to talk about that. I'm here to get a prescription and move on down the road. I'm not going to try to change you."

With that, a security guard came in. What he had done was hit the buzzer because. . . I was raising--I'm deaf in one ear--so I guess I was raising my voice. I wasn't going to reach across and choke [him] because I could have done that easily, and I could have done it with the security guard there. There was no need to call the security guard. None. He said, "I think you're having a bad day. So I'm going to send you home now, and security is going have a few instructions for you." Well on the way out the door, I got a little bit boisterous, and I got a letter from them the next week, telling me how to check-in with security for everything I do in Boston at the VA. And I've been doing that now for three years.

. . . I had a hearing [at the VA], and I had a particularly difficult time in part of the hearing. The Veteran's Administration rep., or [rather] the hearing officer, said to me, "I just want to make something perfectly clear. I represent the United States of America in this particular job that I'm doing right here." I looked at him when he said that to me. What he's telling me, is that he represents the Veterans Administration, i.e., the United States of America! Well what a frikin wrong thing to say to a vet at a hearing for a disability! Excuse me, if I wasn't given the idea that I represented the United States of America at the time I got this thing, well I guess I wouldn't be here then. [It is] kind of like workman's comp. for the veteran. You're telling me you represent them. Does that mean we're both on the same side, and we don't have to have this hearing? What does it mean? If you

represent them and you're *against* me, that means I'm on the outside now, right? But I *used to* represent them!

. . . My youngest daughter went to Martha [and] said to her--she was eighteen at the time--and she said to Martha, "I think dad is dying." Martha didn't know what to say. [Martha said,] "I don't think so, but he's going through some difficulties." . . . I had lost 40 pounds. . . at the very end, when I was hospitalized. I had gone from like a hundred-and-eighty down to a hundred-and-forty, which is a big drop. . . . I couldn't put a good hour together, let alone the whole day. I think it was pretty apparent that I was falling off of the deep end.

. . . I went to the hospital for three months, got out and had thought I had done a lot of work. A month later, I was almost in the same situation. [I] went back for three more months and came back [home] after that. That [return home] was much better, much better. And then I stayed in therapy, too. Things were much better.

. . . [There were] good people, caring people, [at the hospital]. It was a place where you had your dignity because all of the patients were in their forties. They were all my age straight across the board, and all [represented] different kinds of [military] service. They gave you a place where grown men could have their dignity, not like [at] the VA. They stick eight people in a ward or something.

. . . I spent six months of my life there, so I received a lot of counseling. I learned a lot about what other people were going through because I hadn't paid a lot of attention to other people [or] other veterans. [I hadn't paid attention to] the way we were walking, [to] the way we were going through life, [or to] what we were doing. All of our paths weren't the same, but they were similar in some respects. We had problems with relationships; we had [problems] keeping people [and] allowing people to get too close to us; we had problems with just dealing with things. I went through a lot of counseling there--we all did--that was very meaningful for me.

. . . I haven't been in a group since the hospital, but I still go to therapy once a week.

. . .When I left there [the hospital], it was the first time after three months. I left, and I was upset all the way back home. . . . Did I want to leave? Yes, but there was something I was leaving behind me. It was tough. It was tough. But I should of had faith that I'd see everybody again a month later. The second time there was better for me. The first time was to get my feet on the ground and to catch up with my thinking that I had not paid attention to in twenty years, or tried not to think about. Then I started working on the past.

Therapy is, without a doubt, important because it gives you a place to unload. It's not fair to unload on somebody that's not going to carry the bag with you. If the baggage you are carrying isn't theirs, it's not fair to make them carry it with you. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. But I fully believe in therapy, and it works; it works. I would recommend it to anybody.

. . . I had a psychiatrist once who said to me, "Vietnam veterans are notorious for missing appointments. I want you to make sure you make your appointments. Unless you give me a three day notice, I'll charge you for them." I said, " Why am I feeling that this conversation is going sour between you and me?" He said, "Well what do you mean?" He said, "You might not like this either. I'd also like you to take your checkbook because I find it difficult to get paid for things from Vietnam veterans." So I just told him he was fired, and I walked out of the office. That was my bad experience with therapy.

What do I like about it? I don't know. I think you can like something about it, [but] it's not like fun. It's kind of like breathing. . . . If you have a difficult time with it [breathing], and you have a time when it's not difficult, that would be a lot of fun too, I guess. It's more like taking a vitamin pill or something. You . . . *know* it was good for you. Does it give you any immediate reaction? No, but you just know it's good for you. You know you have less things to think about when you go out of there. The days when

you don't want to go are the days when you have to go. That came from a lot of experience--*not* going on the days I had to. I believe in it. There have been times when I thought I was on the steep canyon wall hanging on by my fingernails. I think it's like someone throwing me a rope. You need to have the right relationship with the therapist. I don't have a lot to talk about with Vietnam [now]. I don't have a lot to talk about. I have a couple things that bother me from time to time, but it seems like I'm just tagged with them. I think a lot about some good people because I think I care a lot about them. Shit happens. I just *did it*. It happened.

. . . I don't know how you cure me. I don't know anything that bothers me that I didn't do. It wasn't like I was raped. I think in that case you're hurt. You might be able to cure somebody from what torments them, in terms of someone who has been a victim or something. If I'm a victim of anything, it's the government [because of] where they sent us all and the *job* they sent us there to do. I don't dwell on that a hell of a lot. I don't dwell on it.

I just have difficulty sleeping. If that's something inside that's telling me that I'm guilty about what I have done, then I say, "Screw it." There must be something in there that tells me, "This is wrong!" because it keeps replaying. But I know in my heart it's not wrong; it's not wrong. I think it's just the act of doing it. . . . I just think it's the act of doing it, to be truthful. . . . Killing is killing, you know. . . . If you respect yourself, I think . . . [you are] worth killing for. So if I'm in a situation where someone else is going to kill me, I'm not going to lay down. I'm going to do everything I can to come out of that on top.

Then when you add into that [the] responsibility for others' lives, you get more detached from just the feeling of taking care of yourself. If you decide where to go left or right, in a creek bed or over a hill, any one of those decisions can cause you to be in a world of shit; you [had] better make your mind up about that. You're going to make mistakes sometimes. You can't always be right. If you pick left, you have to pick north or

south; one of them is going to be wrong. I'll put it this way: one of them is going to be *less* wrong than the other which could be catastrophic for you. . . . When you have responsibility like that, that's how you think.

. . . I left a very good business because I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't deal with death every day. . . . I owned a funeral home, large funeral home. I couldn't deal with going in there and doing that, dealing with people's grief everyday. So I made some changes in my life. I started charter fishing and delivering yachts. I found out that I really enjoy it. I'm really lucky to be able to do it.

. . . There was a very painful period twenty years after the war, with *not* a significant amount of pain in those twenty years prior to that. . . . I had no idea that when I reached mid-life I would start to dwell on things that happened twenty years ago. I had no idea what happened to me until I went to a MAC-SOG reunion. I had none, no idea. I noticed the . . . year before I got sick, I started getting preoccupied with books and chronological histories of things that happened in Vietnam. I started reaching out for some of the guys in SOG that I hadn't seen in years. I went to a reunion out in Sacramento. After facing that, I went down hill from then.

. . . Some of those guys on some of my teams committed suicide. Another guy that was on the team told me that John would be at the [reunion]. . . . John committed suicide five years ago this next week. The reunion was. . . the first week in December. . . . When I got there. . . his wife told me that he committed suicide a month prior [to the reunion], which would have been a week from today five years ago. . . . That was pretty devastating because. . . I hadn't contacted him for so long because [I thought] it was probably better we didn't talk. I didn't, I made a mistake. I made a mistake . . . I made a mistake in not contacting him. I had twenty years to contact him, and I'd only done it once for a brief portion of time. I should have. . . [for] he meant more to me. But he didn't contact me either. When I asked Jack (a Vietnam friend) about it, he said, "It's funny." He said, "I think about you, but I don't know what we've got for great memories to talk about." I

said, "Interesting thing to think of." I can think of some funny memories to talk about, but I can think of some dark things that are kind of overshadowing. I think it's best to deal with that inside of a closed room.

. . . In the beginning, people should know it might seem like a big mountain to climb. You can put it into control. You can get it in control. You can be there, [and] you can deal with it if you go once a month [or] once a week. Work on it. Put it back; put it back in the bag, and go off and live you life. Yes, there are going to be times when it just affects you more than others. . . . It happened the other night when I came home from the last meeting. When I say, "It happens," I mean I was bothered. I was agitated; I was bothered by it. I didn't sleep, [but] I was fine the next night. I guess [this] just comes from everything that I know now: not dealing with it or not having a way to vent it at the time. I didn't drag any of this with me when I came home, I didn't consciously know it [the effect that Vietnam would have on my life]. [After] a quick change-up, I went back into the work world. I didn't know it would have an effect on me. How I needed a two week rest! I would have gladly hospitalized myself then for another two weeks after I got out of Devens.

. . . I still see a therapist every week, and that's where I take care of *this* business; in there. . . . I leave it there. My behavior has changed quite a bit from the bad days that I had from Vietnam, which was back four or five years ago. . . . It's much much better now. My marriage is as solid as can be. Martha, my son and daughters understand everything, they have been through all of this with me. I believe we are today a closer more loving family in large part because of the strength and understanding they have given me. And that's it. I don't dwell on it. I don't sit around talking about it with a few cocktails. . . . There are times to bring it up and ways to bring it up. Knowing that is part of maturing; maturing with *this* situation.

. . . What your story is doesn't really matter so much to me because I've heard some pretty violent and difficult stories. What matters to me more is the fact that we're all

brothers. [During] the worst time I've ever had, just prior to going to the hospital . . . there was a guy who started the Vietnam veterans' outreach in Boston somewhere. I didn't know him. He worked at the local lumber company. A friend of mine called me and said, "Look, this guy wants to talk to you. Maybe he can help you." I never was going to see him; I had no intention of it. I went there [the lumber company] to pick up something for the house. I gave them my credit card, and the guy was at the contractor's desk. He said, "Hey, I've been asking for you." . . . Then right off the bat, I figured it must be him. He came around behind the counter and he put his arms around me. He said, "I just want to say one thing to you: Welcome home brother!" I grabbed my credit card and walked out of the store. I didn't buy what I came for. I went out to the car, and I broke down crying. I had no idea! I had no idea that something could effect me like that. I was ashamed of it, that I was affected that way. I called him later, and I ended up meeting with him once or twice. . . . But it's just to show you how things affect you.

. . . It consumed me at one time. It wasn't any part of my life, consciously, for twenty years. . . . And then for some reason, at that point in my life, my forties, it started. I started to dwell on things that were related to Vietnam. [I] started to look up old friends. I went to that reunion; and then I *dwelled* on it, I mean, every waking hour for months until it had nearly killed me. I think people have to be made to understand that . . . you need to make a healthy compromise. I'm not the answer now, I'm a patient, not the answer to how you do that. But you need some help to do it. I think . . . you go there [to get help] in their name [in the name of those who did not come home].

. . . As a soldier, you go where the Commander and Chief sends you, and you do the job you're told to do. The job was a rotten, lousy, terrible job. And that's it; that is it. So you expect something when you come home. You don't expect . . . this thing about parades and all of that, that's wonderful. I don't think anybody expected that, but we damn sure didn't expect the kind of response that turned friends against friends.

. . . Outside of this room right now, there's a UH1B helicopter flying. If you listen, you can hear it. Does that kind of answer the question? I don't have to see it, I don't have to have it fly by this room, it's a UH1B helicopter. There is no other helicopter that sounds like it. That's it right there. So how has it changed? I bring certain things with me; they stay with me, no matter what. I don't travel and return [via] the same direction going anywhere. So the military will always be a part of me. I don't sit around and watch war movies. I've never done [that]; I won't do [it], and I don't look to torture myself.

But there are certain things [that you do automatically]; I'll give you example. This therapist was talking with my wife, and my wife said to the therapist . . . "One thing about him that drives me crazy is that he'll never go and return the same way. If he goes to my mother's house, which is two miles away, he'll go one direction, come back another direction; and he'll mix them up all the time. I can't understand why he doesn't just follow the simplest route back and forth." She asked me [about it], and I said, "I don't know." I said, "Yeah, I do it, but I really don't know why." And she said to me, "You know, my brother was a Ranger, and he had a lot of trouble with Vietnam. We used to talk frequently. He would leave the house to go someplace, and he would go in one direction one way and in another direction another time. I would always ask him, when he's going to the end of the street, why does he have to go around the block? And he use to tell me, 'Well in Ranger school they taught us to never go and return on the same route.'" Well I don't believe I'm going to get ambushed, but old habits just don't die.

I don't have hypervigilence about walking down the street or about going anywhere--I went through a little period of that at one point in my life--but it's [that] . . . some things stick with you. I'm incredibly loyal to those people around me. I don't like to see anybody around me hurt or in trouble. Some things stick with you. I can be laying in a boat doing work, and I can hear a UH1B helicopter go by over Boston harbor. I can tell you in a second. There's no sound like it. There's no other helicopter that makes that

combination of rotor blades, . . . it's size and shape and aerodynamics. . . . There is no other helicopter that sounds just like it . . . . So I stop; I look up, and I listen. There were times it use to bother me because I remember how much I use to strain for that sound. It doesn't bother me now, but I guess I took that with me from the military, as well as the fact that I don't go the same way twice.

. . . It [the interviews] bothered me, obviously; it put some mental pictures back in my mind. There were a lot of things I didn't write about or talk about here because I thought about them, and I thought about the person, and [decided] I didn't need. . . to go through that. I didn't need to go through a chronological Vietnam experience. I just talked about the things that have been unsettling.

. . . I want more of a future. I've been plagued with this thing, and I don't know where it comes from. I've been talked to by the psychologists about it. It's like . . . I have a short future . . . and I'm not terminally [ill]. . . . I'm not suicidal, and I'm not depressed about anything right now--I just, I don't know. It's almost like I live for the immediate future. I don't want to plan too far ahead. . . . I've been dealing in the last five years with the *immediate* future--more than one day at a time, but certainly less than a year.

. . . But my plan is to do the fishing myself, rather than entertain people, and I mean take them out [fishing] for a fee. And I find that the minute I committed myself to that, I've got a whole crew of people coming out of the wood-work wanting to do it with me. . . . I think I'm good at it, it's what I love to do. I do commercial skin diving work, and I'm going to continue doing that. So there's something for me to do every day, which is all important. And that's it. [I] just take care of those things I should and find whatever good time I can. Life isn't fair. Anyone who tells you it's fair hasn't got a real good look at it. Just do the best you can, find what you enjoy and squirrel out whatever enjoyment you can. Drive on. If you're looking for things to be fair, you're in the wrong place. You're heading for a fall if you are looking for life to be all roses, buddy.

Glen

. . . I lived down south, [in] Chattanooga, Tennessee. Primarily I grew up there. My parents were Prussian-German, so I had a . . . structured upbringing. I had a normal childhood with the exception of being down South and "mom and apple-pie" stuff. My parents and myself [composed my family], that's it. [I was an] only child. . . . [and it was] strict [growing up in a family of an only child]. I couldn't blame someone else. If something went wrong, I did it, period.

. . . [My relationship to my parents was] very, very good in childhood and very good also in adolescence. . . . Because of my structured, almost Teutonic upbringing, I never questioned authority. My father was the authority. . . . The rules were there. I knew right and wrong. I did wrong and hoped I wouldn't get caught. If I got caught, it's O.K. My father never raised his hand to me, except once when I was drunk and called my mother a "bitch," and I woke up on the kitchen floor with my jaw hurting.

. . . I looked for people that I could get things done through. [I was] the center of the crowd, pretty much. I could get people to do things for me, quite easily, and I enjoyed that. [I was] a little power hungry little nut. . . . Looking back on it, I had no real friends, and that bothered me. I had no one to call a real honest-to-goodness friend. [I realized that] in Vietnam. It was a terrifying [realization]! I was in command of a forced recon unit, a strike unit. As I would watch my people and their interaction with each other, I realized I had missed the boat. In college, in high school, . . . in my adolescence, I missed the boat. These guys had something I would never have! And I was sorry for myself; I guess I was jealous of them.

. . . As a child, I cannot recall being very close to anybody. I never had that desire. I was always alone. I could always do things better on my own rather than depending on somebody else to get there. And when the realization hit, I felt very very sorry for myself. I had missed the boat totally. It hurts [talking about it now]. [It's] not as bad as it was. It . . . still hurts, but at least I can verbalize it, and I couldn't for a long, long time. I couldn't

accept it for a long time. I just couldn't accept that I had been such a shit to myself and denied myself of this true friendship of others. I tried to run the world on my own. I lost the boat. The boat has sunk around me. It hurt, and for a number of years I wouldn't even think about it. It was just too damn painful. Now I can, . . . [due to] old age.

High school was not challenging. [In] College, some courses were challenging, but it was easy. . . . See, down South, we had--and I guess it was in 1968--we had one fellow on campus in long red hair [and] a long red beard who wore bib-overalls and walked barefooted. He was the campus hippie. That was it. It was in Lexington, Kentucky. . . . He was the campus hippie; that was it. I didn't know about marijuana until I was a junior in college; that's because I saw it in a book! It just wasn't done down there. I wore a sport coat and tie in my freshman and sophomore year, to class. That's just the way it was. Then I came back for graduate school [upon returning from Vietnam]. They had burned our ROTC building and stuff like that. What the hell went wrong? I enjoyed the challenge [of school]. I enjoyed women. I enjoyed the sports. And I enjoyed the camaraderie, although within limits, insofar as I wouldn't want to get close to many people. But I enjoyed being with people, and that's about it. Outside of that, I guess I went through my early years almost flat-lined. You know, no real highs, no real lows, like nothing. That's why I say, I missed the boat. I never learned to enjoy things, to actually feel the enjoyment and the hurts.

. . . My parents and their system of honor and correctness and honesty [were childhood factors and influences in making me who I am today], my father especially. [He] almost drilled into me, "Don't say you're going to do something and not do it, then you're worse than nothing. If you're going to do it, at least try. Don't back out of it." I've always kept that. It did me well; I'm walking again.

. . . [My greatest childhood challenges were] trying to understand. . . . School was a snap; that was no problem. Getting people to do things for me, my peers, was no problem. . . . But I just couldn't get what was going on. Something was missing here,

[and] I just couldn't understand what was going on. . . . There was a part of me lacking, emotionally. It's like me standing on the beach looking over the ocean. I'm wondering what's out there, but I have no way of getting out there and seeing it or experiencing it. I had no real emotions of my own. So everything was based upon a very temporal, personal gratification type thing, almost. It's sick, but it's true. I had no friends. I see that, and I know why, now. I didn't want to understand that. I was happy in my own little world. I was probably mentally ill back then. I know this is not helping you. . . . I felt I wasn't giving you what you wanted to hear! I've got nothing there in my childhood; nothing, you know. I know what I was--I preyed on people--I was a parasite. I had nothing of my own. And if you wanted something else [from my childhood], I have nothing there.

. . . I didn't receive overt affection and love from him [my father], but I knew I was loved beyond a shadow of a doubt. My parents were not openly affectionate toward me, but I knew I was loved; there was never any question about that, never.

. . . I guess the simplest way of explaining it is things were black and white when I was a child. There was a right and a wrong when I was a child. I did a lot of wrong and didn't get caught, but I knew it was wrong. But there was a right and a wrong, a "yes" and "no." "No" meant no, period. And there were definite lines within the box. You have a little framework here, and if you step outside the framework, you're in trouble. But you can do pretty much anything you want to inside the framework here. That's the way I lived.

. . . My mother [was the most attentive in listening to my stories]. [She was] very [patient in listening to my stories], I guess, up to a certain point. If I carried on too long then, [she would say,] "I've got things to do." Same with my father except he didn't have the patience she did. It's like, "What's the story? What's your point? Fine, I've got to go." . . . She was a homemaker. . . . She had things to do in her normal routine of life around the house, and if I went on too long about something, it inflicted upon her time

schedule with what she had to do. It didn't happen all the time, but a lot of times, if I babbled on, that's what would happen. . . . [She would say,] "tell me about it after this."

. . . I guess the first time I can honestly recall being accepted in the adult world as a child was when some of my father's friends came to me about questions about their firearms. My father knew a lot about firearms. I learned from him. And I continued learning the process because it was interesting to me. It really surprised me that they bypassed dad and came to me with the questions. I was probably 14 years old.

. . . Yes, [I can remember being silenced. I would be told,] "That's enough! That's it! Nothing else said." [I felt] shut down, closed off, like my emotions are stopped! . . . [I felt like saying:] "I'm trying to get this explained to you, but you won't allow me to!" I felt hurt, anger, all of the above emotions, but yet I couldn't express it in my household. It was almost like I took my heal and dug a hole. [I don't recall a place where I could express my emotions]. . . . unless I did it outside in the woods by myself, and I talked to the trees but I don't recall doing a lot of that. . . . [My emotions were] just one of those depressed, suppressed piles of junk upon junk that . . . you won't deal with . . . until it comes up.

. . . [Childhood stories that I tell most often are] the ones when I did stupid things and got caught because they're humorous. I don't want to tell the painful ones when I wasn't understood, when I was misunderstood, when I was shut out. . . . Very seldom do the ones of the real inner me get out.

. . . When I was a child . . . I ran out into the street between two parked cars and almost got hit by an oncoming car. [This was] the only time my father spanked me. He spanked me very, very hard, and he got tears in his eyes. I didn't understand, until well many years later, why it hurt him to do that. I scared him for one thing; I could have been hurt, or killed. And it was the emotions he couldn't show, the absolute love he felt. So it turned into this ridiculous anger which turned into a spanking; but he was crying. I didn't catch on, until I was in adulthood, what it was. That story, that incident, always stuck

with me for some reason. . . . He's literally beating the hell out of me. He was crying! I never could understand that until now; [now] I know. He got scared. His son could have been killed, and he couldn't do anything about it.

. . . I think preparing for Vietnam [could be found in] the structured rigid lifestyle I was living in childhood. [It was] very militaristic, where I was literally under orders. A lot was expected of me without excuses or anything else. "You *will* do this; period." I think that helped me a lot in the command situations. But also, the flip side of that was also devastating to me--from the non-emotional [way of being I had established] standpoint--because my emotions really hit the frying pan in Vietnam.

. . . After one is there for say six months, and you're in daily constant contact with the enemy, you become numb to *everything*, literally *everything*. You have no highs, no lows. The jokes that are told are extremely morbid. If I heard those jokes now, I'd think the person should be locked up, locked away. That was the normal person talking to us. [For instance] a guy would come walking over holding a head with a cigarette in it and says "He smokes this brand." . . . There was no feeling; there was no humanity. That's tragic. But I felt nothing. I didn't feel it. I didn't feel a thing at all. But of course in the throes of it, I didn't think much about it because . . . you're a piece of meat. It got so bad [that with] the new people--replacements, quite a few of them came into my outfit--we wouldn't even bother to give them names. Everybody had a nickname at first, but those people [the replacements] didn't need one, [for] they would be dead tomorrow, this afternoon. That's exactly it; why should I spend time upon a name? I didn't even want to talk to them as their commanding officer. . . . I'd give that [job] to the Sergeant [and say]: "You talk to them. You deal with it." I didn't even want to see them. Part of that was from the standpoint I didn't want to get to know these kids. When they die, you hurt. The other side of that was I was probably younger than 80% of my men. Yet I felt lonely because I had the responsibility of command dumped upon me and I was not ready for it. I had no idea what the brutality of combat would be like. . . . I have seen all the movies, gone

through all training, gone through lectures, [but when] it was actually real, it was horrifying!

. . . The coldness I had going into Vietnam sustained me, I think, and kept me from going crazy. . . . I didn't make friends in college or high school; I didn't want friends. I thought I was something special by myself. . . . That kept me from making the wrong decision of making friends and seeing them go home in body bags. But it also hurt equally like a two-edged sword; it cut both ways. It worked for me in one respect but I could see it as a detriment for my heart. I wanted this closeness but I couldn't have it. There would be guys that had been in high school together, lived next door to each other and grew up together. They were friends. I would never have that, never; and I was envious, and it hurt. And yet I'm the one who had to order them out.

. . . There's two sides to that issue [of what my family's view of war and being a soldier were]. The side I've taken for a number of years is the fact that here all these people going off to war; I'm getting the benefits of the American culture, and yet I don't want to provide for it? I'll go too. Bull, that's a lie! I found that out in myself in the last few years. I've been lying to myself all this time. Actually, I wanted to see if I could do it, *for real*. I just wanted to feel equal. . . . The Army is largely draftees; they are cannonfodder. I don't want any part of that. The Navy and the Air Force don't go into ground combat all that much. Then there's the Marines. They're supposed to have the best, toughest training that is possible. If I can make that, if I can make the Marine Corps boot camp, I'm happy. Well I did; I won the dress blues. I was envoy man in my platoon. Then I boarded the bus for Quantico OCS, Officer Candidate School, so I had double duty. But I wanted to see if I could do it with [the Marines], [to see] if I had the stuff to actually do it. . . . I found out it takes a lot more than. . . what one thinks they're capable of doing. The human being can provide infinite grounds for virtually anything they want to do if the situation requires it. I've seen men do things that are humanly impossible, but they did it.

. . . I rode in the first-class car all the way through life at that point. [I] graduated . . . and went to college with a snap. I'm faced with something [joining the Marines] that could be a detriment to my health for the final aspect. . . . I went home and had to deal with my parents that night. My mother, normally as mothers do, [asked,] "What did you do today, Gary?" "I joined the United States Marine Corps," [I said]. Dad's knife and fork hit the plate. He was in the military, World War II. . . . He ordered her out of the room. "I want to talk to you. What the hell have you done. What, what did you join?" [he asked]. And I said, "The United States Marine Corps!" And he went ballistic, "Of all things, the Marines! Why the Marines? Anything, I don't care, anything, but why the damn Marines?" . . . That's the first time I've ever seen him display such grandiose emotion. I don't think I've ever seen him do that before; I mean he was off the wall. . . . The thing I'm most proud of in those years, the one thing I'm most proud of is what I said to him. He calms down now and says, "Look, I know people." He worked with politicians. . . . So much of it is a game. You can do anything down South, at least, you could. So he said, "I know people. I can get you out of this." I'm proud of myself for the one thing I said. I said, "Could you look at me the same way if I said, 'yes, do it?'" And he cried and said, "No, I couldn't." And I knew it.

That was probably the first growing up thing I did, my first adult thing. All the way through grade school, high school and college, that statement right there was my first step, you might say, into adulthood where I took responsibility for my actions. He did [honor it], very much so. He didn't want it to happen, anymore than I want my son to go off now, especially now. I'd break both of his legs, [because] this country's not worth fighting for. This stuff is not worth fighting for. Of course, I know he'd probably feel the same thing. My son's 11 years old and if he came to me and said, "Dad, I joined the Corps," right now I'd go ballistic. . . because I know what's facing him. I probably would react like my father did.

. . . Basically the preconceptions I had [of being a warrior were that]. . . it's a John Wayne type thing. It's glorious. I'm serving my country type bull shit. . . . I looked forward to it. That was my duty. . . . I did say to myself, "Who am I that I'm living with all the freedoms, and I don't have to pay for it?". . . I guess my preconception was basically, Hollywood.

My father wouldn't talk about it very much. Rarely did he talk about it, or much at all, except the funny stuff. Now I understand why; [it's] because the other stuff was just too painful. He mentioned the funny stuff, and some of his friends would do the same thing. . . . It was all funny, so I thought it must be a big game war.

. . . My experience in the Marine Corps was interesting. I joined the Marine Corps enlisted on the two year enlistment program; one year [of] training, one year [of] Nam, I'm out, no reserve time, fine; [or at least] that's what the recruiter said. . . . So I got picked out, at Paris Island boot camp, for OCS about half-way through boot camp. They came into me and said, "Do you want to go to OCS to become an officer?" I said, "Yes sir, yes sir, fine." I thought it would get me out of Paris Island. Paris Island was hell! . . . When I graduated from Paris Island, I graduated with honors, at the top of my platoon. I won the dress blues with the PFC stripe shinning. But when they stopped the ceremony and everybody went to their family, my family didn't come down to see me graduate because I had to leave. I didn't get a chance to see my family because I had to go back to my barn and pack my sea bag and catch a bus for Quantico, Virginia. I got off to the bus at Quantico, and I'm still wearing my PFC-stripped dress blues, yet I'm at OCS. The Sergeant looked at me and said, "Oh, too good to be an enlisted man? Come here, sweetheart." Here we go again! It's never ending.

I opened my mouth to a Colonel because I was scheduled to go to flight school. I had all these visions the snoopy trip: "Phantom jet shoots down Mig over North Vietnam." I was ready. There were six or seven of us they had pulled out of the battalion to go to flight school and we were going to have coffee and doughnuts with the airwing people. So

I sidled up next to this Colonel, looking to impress him with my nonsense and I said, "Pardon me sir." He said, "Yes, candidate." I said, "How long does one stay on a flightline?" like I knew what the hell a flightline was. I just heard it in some movie, probably. I thought I would get by with that. And he said, "I think three years." I said, "'F' that," and as soon as the words got out of my mouth, I knew I was killed. I locked at attention and stood there and sweated. And he says, "'F' what, candidate?" He called the whole room to attention, put his arms very fatherly around my shoulder, and said, "This fine young candidate has volunteered for RECON. See you in hell, son." I didn't know what RECON was. I was just in training for the Marine Corps, so I didn't know. But all the Sergeants kind of laughed at me and smiled, "Pity you, you son-of-a-bitch." . . . I learned enough to keep my mouth shut. . . . It was a good lesson though. If I had made it to flight school, I probably would have been shot down over north Vietnam and been a prisoner of war for ten years or something like that. It worked out well. Actually the RECON, the Force RECON, trained me for where I was, [and] trained me the best for staying alive in the jungle in Vietnam. So I actually had the best training possible to do what I was doing, and it gave me the best chance for staying alive.

. . . I enlisted after college, the next day, as a matter of fact. . . . [I was stationed] in Qung Nam Province, the Qnison Mountains, which is North Central Vietnam, around Da Nang. . . . [I was in country] 11 months.

. . . As far as morale, the morale was excellent. . . . RECON and FORCE RECON are [both] trained specifically to go out in reconnaissance and to radio back operations or any positions to be struck by larger units or by air power, or whatever else. FORCE RECON Strike Units went out to engage the enemy in combat, to hit and run much like the United States Navy Seals to now.

. . . I was in a Strike Unit. I had a fifty-five-man unit, i.e., a platoon broken down into five teams and we had engaged the enemy wherever, whenever he was. [The enemy was] the NVA, primarily, especially in the North because after the Tet offensive in '68 . . .

the Vietcong cadre had been virtually destroyed. There was still VC around, but they were of no real consequence. . . . The average operation would put my unit in the field ten days to three weeks depending upon the strike operation . . . but on the average about . . . ten days to two weeks.

. . . It also made it difficult from the standpoint that you rely so much on these individuals, yet you can't show the affection, or you don't want to; You're afraid to [because] if you lose them, it hurts! . . . Most of my unit are dead. . . . I didn't have any problem there [since] I was numb emotionally anyway. It was just like I would see it, recognize it, feel it and then file it away for some other time. I couldn't afford the luxury of emotions then; there were other things to do. And if I did, I'd be a blubbering ball of tears and do absolutely nothing. Yes, it did numb the feelings of affection and whatever else. Feelings had to be stuffed so deep inside because if they came to the surface, you couldn't perform your job well. You had to separate emotions from the situation. They were mutually exclusive, actually.

. . . I guess, [the separation of me from my emotions continued] until about three years ago. I was aware of the cause intellectually, and I was aware of the problem intellectually; but emotionally it didn't hit me until three years ago; . . . "collide" would be a better word. [It was] like two speeding freight trains on the same track, and I'm caught on the track and tied down. . . . Yes, it did actually [catch me by surprise]. I wasn't fully aware of it until this young lady friend of mine and I went to DC for a tour, and we stopped at all the monuments. . . . The Lincoln Memorial is looking down the hill to the Vietnam monument. It first hit me then, and I couldn't go. I did force myself to take a photograph of the statue of the three, but that's it. I couldn't go any further; I know too many names hanging on the wall. That wall was the confrontation point right there; I was faced with reality. . . . [The reality was] the situation I had to come to grips with, period. This is it; it stops right here. You face it up front. . . I tried not to [face it]. Matter of fact, I tried very hard not to, but shortly after that, I began writing a book; fiction which turned out to be

mostly not so fictional. That was the release that I found that I could use. I sat at the computer and cried most of the time, and that was the release I needed. I could come to grips with it by calling it fiction, at least that's the way it worked. . . . It was a flanking movement definitely. It was not a frontal attack [because] I couldn't face it; I really couldn't.

. . . [I'm not flanking it] so much anymore, thankfully. I've done quite well comparatively, to myself. Just the fact we're sitting here talking and I'm not crying, blubbering, or totally shocked by it, that's progress. . . . I've always, I guess, denied the existence of it because of the emotional separation. Before, I still held on to that [separation]. It was separation that I began in Vietnam. I still held on to that because to do otherwise was frightening, and I just couldn't do it.

. . . The funny things, fortunately, have remained over the last 26 years, more so than the horror. If I think deeply enough, all of it comes back. I try and refrain from that. The funny things are indeed funny; it brings a laugh to anyone because of the absurd humor involved, and that's about as deep as I want to go. Sitting in a room with myself, I try not to think about it. It hurts too damn much. . . . Yes, from a personal standpoint, [there is some value in keeping some distance by not remembering too much]. As I said . . . I do not want to be alone [with the pain] at all. . . . As I said before, I've only been aware of it in the last three years or so. So no, it has not always been the case [that I can deal with the pain]. . . . Early on, I would not allow it to come up; it was well hidden. [I] can't say [that I did] anything specific [to keep it hidden]. I just refused to allow it, period. That was it. It hurts too damn much. It's almost a denial.

. . . I can't say that I was troubled as others I've heard of, at least, I wasn't aware of it. I have had nightmares, but everyone seemingly has nightmares. The nightmares I have had concerning Vietnam were indeed nightmares, but [they were] not that frequent. I have heard various individuals . . . [who were] getting a little upset with me, [say], "I don't know what you're talking about in you sleep. Please shut up. I'm going home." . . .

So I guess I do kind of remember [in my dreams], but I'm not aware of it. I think that mentally, for whatever reason, [because of] a safety valve perhaps in my well shut-up brain, I do not remember a lot of the nightmares. As a matter of fact, I do not remember my dreams. Obviously, we all dream whether we remember it or not. . . . It's like one part of my subconscious totally for my benefit, closes itself off from the conscious. [It's] like [it says,] "We'll deal with this here in the subconscious, but as soon as he wakes up [we are] shutting down." I have to say it in that respect because, to myself, there's no other way to explain it.

It's like there are two people inside of me, the conscious and the subconscious, and they're both vying for my participation with them. One side understands the reality of the emotions and knows pretty much what it will do to me if those emotions are allowed fully to the conscious realm. There again, we're looking at multiple personalities almost. That's what I see it as. I guess that's the easiest way to deal with it. That's the way I can deal with it, personally. . . . Yes, [it's almost as if there are different parts of me that have been in different contexts.] . . . Yes, [the different parts don't always get along]. . . . Recently, yes [I've begun making peace between these different parts]. It's kind of all molding into one now, and I think that was [due to] the acceptance over the past very few years of what is reality. I think it's a milestone.

. . . I first began this limited peek into myself when my children were born, [actually] not until they were 18 months (two years ago). I began to realize that I was requiring from basic toddlers what I would require from trained Marines: instant obedience. I love my children, . . . then I'd get mad at myself for doing this because they're not going to instantly obey me. They don't know how; it's not their fault. Then I would berate myself severely for my actions toward them, and it became a vicious cycle. Little by little I spun out of it to where I could look at it from the outside, as an outside observer, seeing what a mess I had made of my life because of this. . . . It was like being almost in an out-of-body experience with the exception I was still confined to an earthly realm. I was like

an observer seeing myself do and say these things, yet being in touch with the emotions that drove those actions and sayings, and knowing the falsehood that was connected with doing and saying this. I was acting out something that was not really true. What was initially true was what I was not looking at or dealing with. In other words, I was throwing out something internally and getting angry about that or doing something about it, but that instance had nothing to do with what my emotions were really upset about. I know that the psychologist . . . might know something about that, but to my way of inclination, that's the way I looked at it. I was lying to myself, and I got caught by myself. I guess that was the first time I actually ever confronted this; when I caught myself lying to myself. I don't know how better to explain it, but that was the reality of fact to me. I was lying to myself.

. . . Yes, I was [operating on two levels]. [There was] the functional outside level that society saw, that I was relatively intelligent [person who], could get around [with] no problems. Understand, I had no problems. Yet the other side of the fact [or the on the other level], I was a bundle of emotions, but I would not allow the outside to see that. [This side was] very internalized. . . . It was a boiler that was going to explode. There was no safety valve. . . . I had not made the connection of the two. The trains are coming; I'm tied down to the track, and I'm going crazy that this is going to hit. I'm in trouble. It was only by the efforts of a few that were close to me and knew me that . . . made my train wreck somewhat survivable. . . . All they did was force me to be honest with myself . . . . These gentlemen were psychologists. . . . They knew all the games in the book, plus they were Vietnam vets. They knew what was hidden and how it was hidden, plus they knew what the books were saying about how to get it out. They would not let me lie to myself; they refused to believe the little minuets and stories that I was giving about what they should know. [They would say,] "Bull shit, it's a lie, [and] you know it. Tell me the truth." That lasted for a while until I finally broke down and told the truth.

. . . [What I've talked about the most from Vietnam has been] the closeness of the unit, which is odd because I wasn't close to anyone. It was something I was seeing, and [I] wanted all my life to have this level of friendship. But because of my position, rank, station and the fact that I emotionally could not go to them, . . . it [made it] impossible for me to do my job correctly. So I was put between a rock and a hard place. But I marveled at the closeness that we all had, at least in that situation. That's basically what I remember the most. The funny things, the stupid humorous things, . . . and that closeness.

. . . My third wound. . . [involved being] hit in the head, on August 2, 1970 [and it ended my tour in Vietnam]. [I was hit in the head by a] mortar fragment. [It was a] penetrating wound, causing hemaparalysis and aphasia. Hemaparalysis is right side paralysis. [I also suffered] aphasia and a goodly bit of not knowing anything. I had two brain operations. One operation was in country at 95th Evac Army Hospital in Da Nang to remove the shell fragments and large bone fragments. I spent, I think, thirty-six hours in Da Nang, and I was transferred to Yucsca Naval Hospital in Japan. I had a second brain operation to remove bone fragment that had been left behind from the first one that was festering and causing pressure on the brain. It's interesting because when I came out from under the anesthesia, in the ICU after this operation, I woke up like that. "Bingo," that bone fragment was what was holding everything back. I can't remember anything between that except the neurosurgeon sitting down beside my bed asking me, "Would it be all right for us to go in? We found some bone fragments left behind from the first one." Like I'm going to say "no," . . . I mean I can't speak anyway. . . . It was interesting from the standpoint that I woke up, actually awake with no leftovers from the anesthesia. I was amazed. It scared the Corpsman to death, too because when I woke up, I sat up. He ran out of the room, [yelling] "Give me a doctor," and they all came back thinking that I'm going through the throes of whatever else. I couldn't speak, but I finally made it known to them I'm all right. What I wanted was to get out of the bed. So after they milled around a little bit, they strapped me to a chair and put a magazine on my lap so I could look at the

pictures. I couldn't read. That's one thing about aphasia, I had no idea what the printed word was. I was ambidextrous before I was hit the third time, but I couldn't trace the block letters "A" "B" "C" with my left hand; I had no idea I couldn't read the cards and letters from my parents or well-wishers. It's amazing.

. . . There were two Navy Corpsmen. They were former Vietnam vets as well. They did their tour of duty there in the hospital, some place else. For some odd reason they came down to my ward and messed with me. The first time I can recall them was, them getting me out of bed, putting me in a wheelchair and taking me to the head . . . because the lights stayed on 24 hours a day. They shut the lights down in the ward, I think at 22 hundred, 10:00 o'clock. They'd put a table . . . over the arms of the wheelchair and put a pencil in my left hand. [They'd give me] a piece of paper and demand that I trace the block letters, A B C. Well of course, I couldn't. I was feeling rather sorry for myself. Then one of them would get right in front of me and call me all manner of names and scream that I could never do this, and [that] Marines were this and that. . . . He finally got me angry enough to where I threw a punch at him with my left hand, and he said, "That's all I wanted to see." And then I began the road back, so much so, that I was ambulatory six months later; I could walk. I was emotionally depressed because . . . [here I was] lying in my bed, right-side paralyzed; I couldn't read, couldn't talk, [and] I didn't want to go home like that. I felt I had been cheated. I had actually some weird thoughts. I didn't know how I was going to do it, but I was going to steal a forty-five [caliber handgun] and do myself because I would not go home like that. . . . I thought it would be better if my parents see me dead, one time. I'm in the ground; I could be remembered but not forgotten. I'm not there as a total reminder. Whereas, if I went home paralyzed like that, my parents would, unfortunately, have to see me dying a little bit at a time in their presence. I was going to "spare them" the misery of that. Bull-shit! I was trying to spare *myself* the reality of going home in that condition. I couldn't take it; I couldn't deal with

that. I was not concerned about my parents at all; I was concerned about me, and I couldn't deal with that.

So when the Corpsmen--I don't know where they came from or why they picked me--when he finally got me so angry [that] I threw a punch at him, he said, "OK, you'll fight; you'll walk." . . . I've tried [to find them]. As a matter of fact, I've gone through the Navy Department trying to look for them. What really hurts is the fact. . . [I never got to thank them].

. . . I was ambulatory, and I could speak somewhat. My right arm was still in a sling, and I had wire sutures in my head. I had lost 40 pounds, so I was a walking skeleton, almost, and hobbling at best. These two men sneaked me out of the hospital, gave me some of their money, put me in their clothes and gave me a trip with them. [It was] a tour of the Japanese Shrines in Akuska, in the mountains. If they'd been caught, they'd been court-marshaled, period; no questions asked, court-marshaled. That impressed me. The possibility of either dishonorable discharge or going to the brig for sneaking me out of the hospital [was real for them]. Here I'm listed as dead and dying anyway. I was not expected to walk at all, and those two men, literally, took their own freedom in their hands, in their effort to give me a chance . [If I find them, I'd say,] "Thanks." I don't know how else to say it.

. . . [Just like] opposite ends of the spectrum; you have life, [and] you have darkness; you have life, [and] you have death. [It's] the same way within our physical world; you have the best and the worst. [The best and the worst] collided [in Vietnam]. I would say [it's] almost damn well impossible [for the average civilian to understand]. You almost have to experience it. I would like to be far more articulate in these things than I am--and I'm sure that there are people that are--but still, to me, you have to actually experience that. It's something you may emphasize or intellectually understand . . . but you will never *know*. That's about the only way, the easiest way, I can describe it. And you're right, it's the best and the worst, and it collided. War is like that. It's an

unfortunate aspect of humanity. But you have the absolute best and the absolute worst of life in any one spot at one period of time.

. . . All of your senses are in full operation when you're in war; they have to be. It's an aspect of survival beyond what you've been trained which brings out those instincts (as well as honing them to specific areas). Plus the human animal is faced with life and death. So survival is based upon what you have learned, what you have seen and done. That is . . . you're there to survive first of all, then to do whatever job you have to do. But you have to survive.

. . . They were supposed to start to pull out in '70. The unit was pulled out, and my Colonel came to me and said, "I'm going to have to extend you and your unit a little while longer ." Of course I hit the ceiling. [I said,] "These guys got to go home." He said, "Well we've pulled out this unit, and there's nothing separating the bad guys from the good guys now except for some South Vietnamese that don't give a damn anyway. So, we're going to put your guys in there as a buffer, an alarm detector. When they step on you, we'll know they're coming." I'm under orders, so I asked him, "Can I tell my people my way?" He said "Sure, so long as you tell them." I said, "OK." [I] got my people together and I said, "All family men one pace forward." They did; [and] I said, "Get your ass out of here, you're gone." Now those guys- they were torn. Obviously they wanted to go home to their families, but they wanted to stay with us, too. I told the rest of them, I said, "Hey, we're here. Pack your trash. We're gone." So, in that point in time, life and death had new meaning for us. I look at it as that's probably the single most human thing I could do, to send them back home. . . . It wasn't you go out and you won't come back, but the chances were pretty much within that realm. We were strictly an alarm unit; when they stepped on us, the rest of the units would know that something's going on.

. . . When I first got there, I was an intellectual idiot as far as reality of combat. . . . I had no idea in hell what it was about. I had been trained well, obviously, but even with all the training it was nothing compared to what it was like, nothing. They train you in

operations, they train you how to do things, they train you to do things when something happens unexpected, but they don't train you to deal with the emotional side it. That was probably the most terrifying thing I saw. There was no one trained emotionally for this, and I doubt very seriously if you can train anyone emotionally for it. Looking back on it, we've done quite well for 220 years with this nonsense.

But I think it was, emotionally, almost like day and night. I went there in daylight, and I walked out in darkness, figuratively speaking. When I came out, I came out absolutely nowhere near the man I went in, not only because I'd been wounded badly, no. The change that began like darkness took place months before I was a machine. I had no feelings, [and] I wanted no feelings. I killed when I deemed it necessary.

As far as torture, when you're a small unit and you're way out in the middle of nowhere, you need information; you need the correct information, and you need it instantly, if not sooner. You cannot deal with being nice to someone. You have to be reasonably assured the information you were getting from this person is about 100% accurate, [so you] torture. That's sad to say, but that's reality when you have a war. The best form of torture that I found was to take a safety fuse, about a meter and a half [long], strip the person, tie them in some fashion to the ground, wrap the safety fuse around them, put a blasting cap on it, stick it up their ass and light the fuse. The safety fuse burns under water so it's quite capable of withstanding blood and perspiration. You cut it and then watch it burn. Then you start asking questions. They will tell you anything you want to know . . . and then you light it and walk away. It's disgusting; it's war. Of course, I couldn't let them go; that would be signing a death sentence for my men, and they were after all, the "enemy."

. . . When Desert Shield went to Desert Storm, the first thing I did was go down to the 25th Marines down here. I knew the Commanding Officer, the Executive Officer, First Sergeants and the Sergeant Major. Everybody is good friends of everybody else. So I run to Sergeant Major's Office, bang on his desk [and say], "Tom, you've got to get me back

in." He was amused. I was serious. I was honest. He asked me, "What the hell do you mean?" And I told him, I said, "I've got to get back in. I don't care how you do it, you've got to get me back in. It's going to be a shooting war over there. I mean it's a bunch of kids over there involved in a war; they don't know what the hell they're going to do!" He was nice to me, told me to sit down and said, "We'll take your wife, your kids, your dog or your cat. [We'll] take anybody before we'll take you again. You've done your thing; you're retired. Forget it." After some shouting and everybody coming in to see what's going on and laughing, he asked me, "How old were you when you went to Vietnam? Did you know what you were doing before you got there? They'll be all right."

. . . It's an interesting fact that the first thing I did when it turned to a ground war was go down there and try to get back in again. I feel--I still do to some extent although now I can rationalize it--to me my job wasn't finished there. I was wounded and taken out before my time was up. It was something I didn't finish. It's unfinished for me. Logically it's an impossibility. Intellectually, I know that; emotionally, I'm dealing with that, but it's still unfinished, for me. I still want to go back, I still want to. Twenty-six years later trying to play combat Marine would be an impossibility. I would get myself really killed this time. But I smell a fire, [like] an old fire horse; [I] hear the bells. Here's where it got me. . . . If you're going to go to war, go to war to win; don't play games.

. . . The passing of time has brought a lot of things that I wasn't aware of, things that come out as far as tapes, papers and documents that were well hidden in those years. I look at it that everyone in Vietnam, as much as myself, got screwed badly- big time. The passing of time makes that somewhat easier to accept. The only hard part is dealing with the fact that so many lives were lost for nothing. That's the problem right there: all for nothing- such a waste. If it had been done correctly the first time, we would have been there 18 months. Maybe then Vietnam would not be North and South; it would be all Vietnam, and it would *not* be communist.

. . . War's not good, but it's like the reality of life. Yes, it's absolutely not good for anything, but it's a necessary part of life. That's perhaps an irrational understanding, but it's true. We can't have utopia; it was not meant to be utopia no matter what people say. It can never happen. I guess the best thing is my growing understanding of me and my relationship to all of this, my feelings about this. As I said, this is all really new to me, within three years of time. So in one respect, I'm just a kid coming up. The one thing I can say is that I know, I've heard from a lot of people, non-vets, that we went to Vietnam as adolescents, [but] we never had a chance to go through our adolescents into adulthood. We were forced into the hell and horror of war. I still feel oftentimes that I'm 19, 20 or 21 years old, doing things that I would at that age. People are appalled at some of the things I do. [People say,] "How can you do that?" [I say,] "No problem. It's fun." I will never recover that time. Somewhere inside the time clock of the human being, the hands are stuck. . . . I think it's a constant returning to what we never had. We never finished our adolescence. A lot of guys go through that. . . . To me, that's a great understanding: [to know] this is the reason why I do this [act adolescent], because I never did [had an opportunity to complete my adolescence].

. . . I'm writing a book. It's finished now. Going through my papers, I found the outline of that book, the exact characters, same time, same plot that I had written in the outline in 1978 in Miami, Florida. I wrote the book in '94, so that was about a 20 year span that was necessary for me to be ready to get it out. But it so surprised me that it was the exact same thing! The outline was the exact [same, if you were to] take that outline from 1978 and put it to the book in 1994. . . . The physician's say it's the short-term memory that's all screwed up; long-term memory, anything over three years ago, I still have access to. I can still access it fairly well ,but further back, surprisingly, can be easier accessed.

. . . But the book was very therapeutic once I got it out; it was like pouring it out of my system on paper. . . . Yes it did [change the way I related to my experience],

immensely. I had written it as a fictional story, but I understand that most authors' first books are somewhat autobiographical; and this was my story, literally. Once I could look at it in print, in chronological form, in some degree of simplicity and order, it made it much, much easier to deal with.

[It was] disgustingly hard [putting order to experience]. I would write down or type into the computer instances that happened to me, but they would not be in any chronological order, . . . because it's all fiction, you understand. . . . Whatever crossed my mind, I had to get it down. Then I'm left with hundreds of paragraphs or pages that don't fit in any order, so I had to go back and re-order the whole thing into book form. That was disgustingly hard. I had to get it out; it was part of me that I wanted out of me. [I needed] to say, "OK, I've done that. I've gone through this; it's past, it's done. There is the finished product. I can touch it, I can look at it; but it's no longer in me, controlling me; it's now in paper. I could distance myself somewhat. It still hurts, but not like it did before I got it out. I couldn't even begin to talk about some of the stuff, even with the computer. I'd sit there and cry my eyes out typing the stuff out. I had it. I went through a box or two of Kleenex just crying on the computer, especially [about] some of the things that I was typing out; they really hurt. But once the flood of tears [passed], and once I could see it in print, it hurt to read it back to me, but it didn't hurt as badly. I understand it.

The exact same thing began in the mid to late '70's in Florida on that outline because that outline can be applied to the book that I wrote in '94 exactly, characters, subject, everything. So the whole thing is there. It seemed like it was waiting for a process, a process that I had to be ready to sit down and deal with. I . . . [spent] a good eight-nine months staying up late at night, three and four A.M., to get this stuff out. I just wouldn't quit. I had one period of time, I think, for three weeks when I just backed off and didn't touch it. And when I sat down and began again to write it, it just flowed again. It's not like an author or anyone else having to think of a story; the story's already there.

It's fictionalized from the book's point of view, but I had the story. I didn't have to worry about thinking of something to write, it was already there.

. . . It's almost like projectile vomiting. . . . This the best way I can explain it; it just kept going out, and I couldn't stop it! Every waking moment, unfortunately, my mind went into it. [My mind] was filled with scenes, people, dialogue, all the time. It was disgusting after a while. I couldn't do anything else but write that damn book. . . . My friends were working on me, wanting to say . . . "Take it easy," but I couldn't! I'd stay up till three or four in the AM typing this stuff out and then go through it the next day, writing down things, writing down instances and going over scenes.

. . . That was, I think, I can't say the beginning of the healing process, but it was damn sure 80 percent of it because once it was done, I felt so much better. I could deal with things; I could face things I had never been able to face before. I had never thought things were problematical within me, but now I could face them. They still hurt, but I can deal with it. It's like the bad stuff's out. I crossed the bridge.

. . . It's like I'd made my peace with those guys, and I'd finally accepted the fact of what happened to them. It was done! Over!. . . . [It was a way of bringing honor] to them. Great people! They deserve it. . . . In the aftermath, you think about: what did they die for? Politically, it's had . . . great opposition; it still does. But to those of us that were there, there're great!

. . . I've only managed to go to the Wall one time. I know too many names on the wall. Now I can go. It still hurts; I'll still cry. . . . It was time at that point when I began this project of the book. I was to let go . . . [of] them and the guilt that I felt because of their death and because I didn't die with them. . . . Surviving something like that with people you're so close to, and losing them on a regular basis, and being stuck with the responsibility of pointing your finger and saying to another one, "Go, it's your turn now;" It was good to make peace with that. They did their job damn well. It's a necessary evil. . . . I had no idea; I was a kid! I was a kid! It's just like when I wanted to go back in '91; I

told Sergeant Major Tom Parson, "There's these kids over there; they don't know what's going on. It's a shooting war." And he told me, "How old were you when you were in Vietnam? They'll do all right." It's an unfortunate thing there'll always be problems; there'll always be conflicts. . . . There'll always be troops going to war . . . it's part of the game.

I feel sorry for the Commanders that have to serve because they suffer. . . . [The commanders only have God to talk to.] Now, the Commanders' situation is much better, after Vietnam. . . . The military has begun a goodly bit of onboard counseling, you might say, both before the fact and after the fact. The Field Commanders do have access to not only the Chaplains and things, but trained "Professionals" are there specifically to deal with the problems these Commanders are going to face in sending kids out to die and knowing it. They can break; you can't get on without breaking. . . . You can't sent kids into combat without some of those kids dying. My fault was I was a kid too and I never had the chance to tell them I was just one of "them." I was always stuck with being . . . in command and [having to] make decisions.

. . . Yes, it did [put some distance between me and them], definitely, but it wasn't a physical or obvious distance for the outsider [to notice]. . . . When it comes down to making decisions, that's what they paid me for, not them. It's an interesting world. I think if the people who start the wars, the so-called leaders of countries, were the ones to fight the wars, and not men and women, there'd be no more war. It's true; at least I think so. Can you imagine Regan and Gorbachav going to war?

. . . I still want to go back and relive those years I missed because I didn't get to be a young adult then. I just didn't. It's kind of funny sometimes [how] I tend to do some really crazy-outrageous things that a 21 year old or 20 year-old in college would do and love it. I have set back and gone, "Whoa, did I do that?" People wonder about me sometimes, too. [They think] "He's not all there." Well, that's true too, but it's just a part of life that I--we combat veterans--never got to experience, and it's always missing,

something we'll always, or at least myself, I'll always be looking at sadly, that I never got to do that. I never got to experience that because I was over here!

. . . I have oftentimes, years ago, thought of myself as a thin forty-five-year-old-man. My mind-set was in the age group of those individual men of that age that I had seen and dealt with. My connection, my values, norms, and whatever else, was more attuned to them than my same age peers with the exception of Vietnam vets because we're all doing the same thing. . . . I've always thought I was, internally, . . . much older than I really was. . . . A thousand percent, yes [that did impact my ability to relate to my peers once I returned]. I could not relate to my peers. I befriended and became friends and acquaintances with those much older than my age group. I felt more comfortable with them. And besides, my peers were the ones burning the American flag, their draft cards and things like that; and I wanted no part of that.

I came back from the war . . . [and] I went to graduate school. I attacked a professor one time because of the point the man said. . . . It was in the Library, it was a small cove off to the side. . . . As I passed by going into the Library, I heard him say he felt the people that died in Vietnam deserved what they got. I blanked out. When I recovered, or could realize what I was doing, I was being dragged out by some of my acquaintances who were all Vietnam vets. "You can't do that Glen, we're state-side now." Definitely, he stepped on sacred ground. Or if he did [know it], he didn't care. I think if you know but don't care, it is unpardonable in that respect. If you don't know, you could be informed rather quickly; but if you just disregard the facts and continue on, that's unpardonable, at least to me.

. . . When I was ambulatory and out of the hospital, I was asked if I wanted to go from Japan to California on a stretcher lying down or on one of the 15 seats in the Cargo Plane. . . . I'd been lying down for too long, so [I decided] I'll stay seated which was a mistake on my part because it's a 15-hour trip. But the elation when the pilot banked over so we could see the Golden Gate Bridge . . . that was wonderful.

We landed and nothing [no celebration or welcome]. It was about four in the morning; nobody was around. There was this little duty shack at the end of the runway, and so me and two other guys hobbled over and scared the poor airman to death when we walked in. [He said], "What the hell are you guys doing here?" [We said], "We just arrived from Yucsca, Japan." "Oh, well you're early. We're not set-up for you yet." So my arrival in the states was extremely low-keyed. Nobody knew I was supposed to be there for one thing; I was still in GI pajamas, thongs and robe because I had lost some 40 odd pounds. [It was like] "We'll deal with you after a while. Go stand over there some place."

I was fortunate to the fact that I had spent several months in the hospital in Yucsca trying to re-orient my life to possible civilian life. I wasn't thrown back on the block as some were; twenty-four hours: you're in the bush one day and on the block the next. That would have been terrible for me. I couldn't have dealt with that. At least I had a number of months, plus dealing with the paralysis and things like that kept my mind off the PTSD type thing. Then I looked so forward to coming back to the states, and nothing was there, nothing! I was actually berated for being there in the first place. They said, "You're not supposed to be here, you're early." We finally got things straightened out, and they gave us coffee and doughnuts and cigarettes, and [they] scrounged around and got us flights out to various places. I had one of the longest flights because I had to go back to the East Coast. Since my hometown was Chattanooga, Tennessee, they were going to place me in Millingeton Naval Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee.

Fine, so I had to fly back across the states in a GI robe and thongs and GI pajamas, going through civilian airports like this. [It was] kind of disheartening, especially with wire sutures coming out of my head--good freak show. I had not anticipated anything like this at all. This was like a worst nightmare. I got to St. Louis, Missouri. To top it all off, the plane they had me on was a damn twin-engine DC-3, . . . an old DC-3 puttering along. It took forever, so I was a bit upset. I got to St. Louis, and I called my parents. Once I

established that, then I could deal with the problems I was going to have with . . . this Piper-cub thing that we had been flying across the United States in. "OK, this is what you think of me; I accept that! See if I go to war for you again!"

. . . Once I got to the hospital, I called them [my parents] again, and they called the Command and got it set up so they could come down as soon as possible, which was three or four days later. That was the first time I had seen my parents in over a couple of years. [They were] happy I was alive, [but] shocked at my appearance. They tried to not betray it, except maybe with a smile and things like that, but their eyes gave it away. Outside of that, it was just a lot of coddling, "Don't do this, let me help you with this." [I wanted to say], "Go away, leave me alone."

One morning when I went home on convalescent leave, my mother had come in the room. She wanted to make sure I was still alive [since] I had slept late. I was still sleeping, and I had made mention the night before that I wanted to be up by a certain time so that I could be out and gone somewhere else. She started to reach over and touch me, and fortunately my father grabbed her, pulled her back to the door and said, "Don't you ever touch him when he's asleep." He was in World War II. "If you want him awake, you call him from the door until he realizes where he is."

. . . [I never talked about my experiences with my father], but I was accepted. I was no longer the son of the father, which I would always be, but I was a man now. I was an equal. I was introduced to his friends. He had not introduced me to them before (when I was in college and high school). I remember seeing them with my father, but I was not introduced to them, [it was] almost like "This is my kid's" type thing." I was of no value to his good friends, but when I came back "from the war," I was proudly introduced. I was an equal. That's the best way I can explain it. We'd go out, he and I, and go to a bar together which we had never done before, never!! And that flabbergasted me. We were coming in one night, one evening real late, and I had mentioned the fact that we were going to have to stop and get something to eat, and he said, "Well, come on with me. I

know this nightclub bar down the street. I'll introduce you a few people." We ate there. So I was treated as an equal.

. . . I guess what I needed most [upon returning from Vietnam] was for someone to say, "Thank you!" No one did. There was one instance when I was retired, just really retired from the hospital, on my way home to stay . . . never again in uniform. I was in the airport; it was early, and of course the bar was vacant. . . . There were two guys down at the other end of the bar and myself and the bartender. I ordered a drink, and what I had ordered did not arrive. I could not afford [what the bartender brought]; I did not *want* to afford the price of what was given me, and I said, "I didn't order this." The bartender said, "Take it." That was the best I got.

So, the only "thank-yous" I got, I guess, were [from] my parents, some of my friends, and some of my parents' friends. It just wasn't a ticker tape parade. I really didn't expect one after I had been in Vietnam six months. We had heard things; we had seen things in the newspapers. So none of us expected any fantastic homecoming, certainly none of the ones . . . like our parents received in World War II. But at least [we expected] something, or some effort to give recognition; but there was none. It was almost like the sooner we can sweep them under the rug the quicker it will be forgotten.

That breeds anger, a lot of anger. [The anger is directed at] oneself. Not at first because one directed it at "the system." In reality, I think that the system was a convenient target. . . . I was extremely angry at the system, and I think I still am. But it was a convenient target. I was angry at myself because I couldn't deal with real life. I couldn't cope; I was hiding. I became a chameleon, literally, I did. Whatever the situation needed as I perceived, that's what I became. I had no sense of self. I was a chameleon. . . . I'm saying [that] in the world, whatever could be done in the world, I falsely did. Whatever actions I thought people wanted from me, I did because the person that I was, was very angry, very stubborn and very hateful towards society that didn't respect us for having been over there in the first place.

. . . Yes, essentially [I protected society from me]. [I pretended to be someone that really wasn't me.] [This went on for] twenty years, I guess. I've only just begun in the last three or four years to unravel that. I've been a paper mache' tiger for a long time, lying to myself. What hurts the most is I lied to myself. To hell with the rest of the world; I lied to myself by doing this, and I thought I was helping myself by playing their game. I could go away and laugh to myself and say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, they think they've got it on the ball. I know better," because I could see through this. Therefore, I allowed this to happen.

But there was another part of me that would be so damn angry at this taking place. What I should have done was rung the person's neck and told him what he's doing wrong. But I didn't do that because society frowns on that type of thing. . . . You can't slap the boss around and tell him he's wrong; [instead], play the game. That's life in the states. It really bothered me because I was disgusting myself for allowing it to happen.

. . . [Putting my foot down] happened over a period of time, almost like the book issue. It came out first blatantly, openly, and I wasn't ready for it. I closed it back in, [and] held it down deep inside where it was safe. Because I had no personality of my own, I couldn't go out into the world as myself. I didn't know who myself was. I didn't know what I was. I had played all these parts for so long; I was afraid of myself because I had all this anger stored inside of me. Once I say, "Let go" to the reality of what I was, what could I hold onto? What would happen? What would we do? I couldn't fly back; so little by little, I began to come out more, more and more. It's almost like the ground hog coming out of its hole to look around to see if it's safe or not. If I didn't feel they were safe, I'd stick back in and I'd play the part until, I guess, three or four years ago when it just kind of exploded.

. . . [I] only [talked] to other Nam vets, not to anyone else because no one else . . . cared, or they wouldn't understand. . . . That was a common consensus with the Vietnam veterans because we had all experienced the same thing from society; so we were in fact a little closed society unto ourselves. I associated with other veterans; as a matter of fact, I

became very very good friends with other Vietnam veterans, not persons of society that are non-military. . . . They don't know what real honor is; they don't know what real sacrifice is. At least these people do. And little by little the branches began to creep into open society and away from my closed society, which is a scary process. [It was] scary because here I was out in the open with nothing. I don't know what it's like to live out there. I've been hiding from the world for twenty years or something like that. But once I came out, I'm damn glad I did; it is a very freeing process. For one thing, I can sit here and talk like this with you and be honest with you about it. . . . [I] would not have even considered [doing this interview] ten years ago.

. . . [When I think about whether other vets know the real me], I can't say "yes." I'll have to say, probably not. But there's enough that they see and inherently know, so that you can usually know and figure somebody out like that.

. . . On a personal basis, yeah, I do [feel I made sense of Vietnam]. I was in the Marine Corps, therefore I was under the authority of the Marine Corps and the President of the United States. I had a job to do. I was paid, trained and sent to do that job, period. I understand that.

As far as the political ramifications of Vietnam, I'm only now understanding what a mess and screw up it was. I look at it with a half-smile and I [think], "You dummy, why did you go do that?" That's so screwed up because we didn't know everything then; *that* we know now. It was a different world when I was in the mid-60's, it's a different world. There was still some honor in the United States. You didn't allow things like this to happen or that to happen. You put your foot down here; you didn't allow this. Now, anything goes. That was disgusting in the war but, I'll have to say, I didn't know what I was going to get into [in Vietnam] . . . . I wouldn't want to do it again, but I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience. Yes, I have [made peace] as much as I can right now, which is quite a bit. Actually, even those that know me are surprised, which makes me feel good. I've come a long way in a very short time.

. . . It's not worth it, it's not worth it! What happened, happened. You can't change that; but you have a life to live, you can change your life. The people you knew and loved, deserve to be honored [and] are honored. Those that don't deserve it, forget them; walk away from it. It takes time. It took me, God knows, at least twenty some odd years just to come to that understanding of a beginning. But it's so damn freeing. It's like day and night; it's wonderful, fun. I'll never forget it. I'll never forgive some of the things that happened, some of the people that caused it to happen; but it happened, it's over, it's past. I certainly can't change history. The only thing that I can do is honor those who sacrificed [their lives] and honor them by improving my life since I'm still here.

Up until a very short time ago, I wanted to be with them. I was angry that I was alive- survivor guilt perhaps, yes, but I was angry that I was left alive. I think about the individuals that had so much to offer far more than I, to society, the world. They were killed. I just didn't understand it. And it would have been easier, obviously had I died with them. I wouldn't have to go through this. But it's not the case; I was saddled with that responsibility. The Supreme Commander decided otherwise, and I'm glad damn He did now because I've learned. I've learned a lot, mostly about myself, that I never knew even possibly existed. Life's wonderful. I still honor them immensely. I don't want to change places with them. I'll be with them soon probably, anyway [due to my injuries]. So when that happens, it happens. Until that time, I can best honor them by doing the best I can with what time I have left.

. . . Yes it does [honoring them provides a sustaining meaning for my existence]. I would say not so much for me, but to bring about what they gave up for all of us. Unfortunately [society does not give those who sacrificed, their due honor]. . . . If they did, they'd straighten their act out. It wouldn't be so . . . childish and worried about incidentals. Incidentals aren't worth a damn. It's the honor of the individual, . . . [or] the group that makes it; anything else is secondary.

. . . [I needed help with the effects of war in my life] all the time. I didn't admit it to myself the first few years. As a matter of fact, I didn't think I had a problem the first few years I was back. Everybody else seemed to be troubled with this PTSD nonsense. "I don't have a problem," [I told myself]. . . . I didn't have a problem until things started falling apart. . . . [Then I started to think], "Well, maybe I do have a problem over this."

I had an individual tell me the problem I had, and the reason why it developed so late in my life, was the fact I did not have to experience the on-and-off of coming back to the States in twenty-four hours ([being] in-country and then back on the block). The people that did that, usually suffered the problems much, much earlier. Since I was confined to a hospital for eight [or] nine months, I didn't have to deal with that. My problem was learning how to walk and talk again.

Then I'm thrown back into society--going to graduate school--[and] there's not really a problem there as long as the long-hairs and . . . the communist stay out of my face. . . . There were a few Vietnam vets on campus, and we all kind of worked together so we all could get out of this. Our effort was mainly geared to school rather than remembering the war. Nobody wanted to remember Vietnam because nobody else did; and those that did, did so dishonorably.

. . . I accept being forgotten but not dishonored. So that's why it was not talked about. That's why I think I developed the symptoms and the problems so much later on in my life. And I had compounded it by forcing all of this down in my system and refusing to deal with it. When it came up, I refused to deal with it.

. . . Yes, [society] definitely [played a role in reinforcing me to kind of bury the Vietnam experience deeper and deeper by dishonoring it]. It just wasn't productive to admit that one was in the Vietnam war or conflict. . . . Nobody wanted to hear it. I have personal experience that even in the business world if you're a Vietnam vet, nobody wanted you. You were almost ostracized because you are crazy, you're on drugs or you were totally anti-social and could go off and kill hundreds of people instantly, if not

sooner, if the wrong thing upsets you. That's what the media promotcd so much. Businesses just did not want to deal with that because of the volatility of what they had heard. The only way I got back into the world, you might say, was [by] going back into the CIA. It was also a safety valve for me [which] I could not have gotten from business.

. . . [The CIA] is largely the gathering of data (intelligence and counter-intelligence) and that sort of thing. . . . The role I played in Vietnam, I wound up doing it again [in the CIA]. The only difference was wearing a three-piece suit and carrying a briefcase. . . . I couldn't believe it . . . a very small minute portion of the entire Intelligence Operation is callcd "Wet-opps" or Potential Hard Operations, and that's what they had me in. So I'm not recovering . . . on a normal basis because I'm doing the same things I did over there [in Vietnam]. It's not bothering me because it's being re-enforced. I can utilize what I learned there in my present job.

. . . I could not, I guess, come out into society after graduate school. Nobody wanted anything to do with the Vietnam vet (this is '75). I went back to what I was good at, so I had no problems with that. I didn't have to deal with situations. I could keep what was decidedly rotten inside of me bottled up; and it did not explode, although it did in '78 [or] '79 (by [writing] the outline of that book). It was coming out . . . and it would not stay down, and that frightened me. That's why I stopped [writing] it. Once I did the outline, I read it, I stopped it , [I] folded it up, but I did not throw it away. I saved it for when I was ready, perhaps. But the beginnings of that outline, brought about stirrings of emotions and threads that required feelings.

I hated to have feelings because to have feelings would mean that I was human. I didn't want to be human because I couldn't accept that, being human. All I could do was cry. . . . If I accepted myself as being human, all I could do was feel pain, the sadness of loss, broken promises, betrayals and whatever else. I'd prefer to be what I was; I could deal with that, that requires no feelings, no thought. But to be human, it requires a hell of a lot; it takes literally, a hell of a man to be a man.

. . . No, [the military doesn't teach you to be human]; it's just the opposite. That's one of the problems. But if you're going to have a military, you can't have a bunch of social workers out on the front lines. So you . . . have to be able to take instructions, give instructions, and the worst of all, they have to be able to take lives freely and not be so bothered by it that they fall apart and turn into a whimpering bag of tears. You deal with that later on, after the conflict.

. . . After the Vietnam thing, and after the Storm, I think the government, and . . . a lot of the people are becoming concerned about what we went through and why we're never able to turn loose of it. A lot of the problems of a lot of individuals, I think, resulted specifically from the fact that no one was there for them, to be able to turn lose of what they had seen, done, felt or heard. "How can I deal with this, this horror?" Nobody would believe them if they did [share]. Nobody cared because everybody was carrying around pictures of Chairman Mo and waiving the Vietcong flag when these guys came back. This created a definite animosity between their peers and themselves. I know it did with me.

So there was nothing; you're in a class by yourself. You're locked in your own little world. That's why when Vietnam vets get together, it's almost like instant recognition even if they're strangers because there's nobody like us. Nobody wants to be like us, fortunately. . . . We've gone through so much, not so much over there-- that's the normalcy of war. If you get hurt or die, that's normal. It's happened for ten-thousand years. War is war, period. But to come home--or come back, not home--[to] come back and be treated thus, *that's* the problem. That's where the problematical situations began for all the neuroses that all of us have had to undergo and suffer. Unfortunately a lot are still suffering so.

. . . I shot a cop. . . . He didn't do what he was told. He didn't stay in a position [that] I told him to stay in, and unfortunately I'm faced with a situation of seeing a back-lit figure coming toward me with a gun. I have maybe, at most, two seconds to react. I shot first, and unfortunately, I'm good. So I was asked to leave after a lot of problems. I was

given a job in Wyoming. . . . It was a Federal position in the DVOP (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program) which was a federal sponsored position within the Department of Education and Employment. That's where I first began to see the structures and the problems that I didn't want to deal with. Other veterans would come in with all these problems and call upon me to try and help them find work. I was very damn good at that. I didn't realize it, but I had been *placed* there. The job was there for me, period. I didn't have to apply for it because of what I'd [been through]. [The CIA thought], "We're putting him there because it is the best place for him. It will get him out of the way." They didn't want me in front of some . . . investigating hearing.

But it [this job transfer] helped me from the standpoint that I could deal with the hierarchy of the business on a professional one-to-one basis to help these people; and that made me feel good. But there was also a sadness in the fact that I couldn't go to someone and pour out my soul. . . . I'm the last in line; who do I go to? It's like . . . who does the Pope go to when he has problems? So I dealt with that for a while.

There was some bit of counseling involved early on. I sat in on a couple of sessions because everybody . . . [recommended it]. I didn't like it because it hurt too much; it brought too much out that I didn't want to recall, that I didn't want to experience, didn't want to feel. It hurt too much so . . . I stopped.

I lived my life pretty much that way for a long, long time until . . . the mid '80's. A friend of mine was going [to the local Vet Center] and asked me if I wanted to come. Well, I didn't want to be around those kind of veterans and that kind of situation. "No, no, I don't have any problems," . . . Yet the whole time I realized that I'm a sick son-of-a-bitch here, but I was afraid to admit it. So I went, and I chose the time while he was there. Sitting in the library, reading books, going through it little by little, by little, I got to know Steve, and he knew enough until I came to him. [I came and said], "I need to talk to you." He says, "About time." And that was the first time that I'd actually gone and cried.

. . . Then shortly after that, I should have done it again, [but I didn't] because it hurt too much, it got too close. I didn't want to give it [his warrior self] up because that was all I had and could understand. All I had was Vietnam. That's all I had. It's sick but that's, it's true, that's what I was basing my entire life on. Thank goodness things changed!

. . . [Upon giving up my warrior identity, I learned] I'm a better person than I thought I ever could be. I'm a nice guy, hell, at least that's what they tell me. It's a freeing process.

It's like when I was doing the book; I would sit at the computer and cry--bawl like a baby--and that's what I needed to get it out. As I was typing it on the computer screen, there was no trouble with dialogue. I had heard it all before. . . . It was so easy, but it was a necessity that I had to get out and face. I was facing it by reading the print [and] by seeing it. Even if the names were not "correct," the situation was. . . . It hurt like hell the first few times [I connected events and feelings]. It hurt badly. . . . I could actually draw those feelings up that I had set down for well over twenty years. [The feelings] had really ruined me for over twenty years because I had not dealt openly with those feelings because first, I thought I had no problem for a long time, and second, when I realized I did have a problem, I was ashamed of it. I don't know [where the shame came from]. Some ridiculous standard about being a "Man" or something like that. . . . I'm sure a lot of misconceptions from my childhood on up just really turned the screws on me. Plus I was afraid that if I started crying, I wouldn't stop; and that damn near happened a few times, too.

But I think the big thing was: if I start allowing this out, I'll go crazy from all the remorse, pain, hurt, and bad feelings, and I just won't stop crying. I'll just wind up in a damn rubber room some place crying my eyes out. Yes, [it would be overwhelming] because it was overwhelming in reality. I'm surprised that I didn't blink out then; and then

to relive it is even worse. But I thank God I did. It's a better world now. I can actually sleep without drugs. [Before], I never had been able to have a good night's sleep.

I stopped drinking about ten years ago. . . . I was afraid I was becoming an alcoholic because I was putting away a lot of Scotch constantly just to deaden the nerve endings, and it helped me sleep. I had to sleep; I couldn't do it unless I was doped up on sleeping pills or damn near drunk. When I stopped drinking, it made it all that much harder because . . . [my body was] used to the alcohol consumption. I had to replace it with something else. Then my mind was clear, or seemingly so, and I couldn't deal with what I was going through at night because I had never in the past had to deal with this. I don't recall ever having nightmares or being bothered with nightmares. There were a number of times I would wake up and the bed would be soaked. Or, my partner would say, "I'm leaving," [and] she'd get dressed and go on home. "What did I do?" [I'd want to know]. I don't remember what I dreamed, that's the good part.

I've blown two marriages. I think the first one was mostly her fault [and] partly my fault. The last one was primarily, I'd say, 80 percent because of what I couldn't give. I couldn't express myself, I couldn't show feelings, I couldn't show emotions; therefore, I could not show love, or tenderness, or affection. I could imitate it; I'm a great chameleon. I've been doing that for a long time. . . . If it's not the real thing, it looks good on the outside, but . . . the feeling's not there.

It would have been impossible [to write the book when with my former wife] because I couldn't have cried in front of her because we weren't close. I couldn't experience the closeness, then. I was always [at] arm's length. I would not allow anyone to see me because I was afraid if they saw me, they'd either be repelled by the repulsiveness that was there, I thought was there, or [they'd see] I was something other than what I thought I was. I would not let anyone see the real me; that's why I became such a good chameleon.

. . . I feel better about the children, too. That's something else that's very important to me. I am better able now to express myself to the children and to love them honestly without holding something back; to feel their love toward me which is very important. It's surprising a child is so unquestionably and unquestioningly open, loving, honest and sincere.

I think that's what broke the back of all my problems; it was seeing the kids when I would get on my high horse, playing Marine. . . . They are children and are expected to do [this and] that. They would respond, "That's OK, dad, it doesn't matter." I was amazed people could still have such open, honest love and be able to express it and deal with it because I never could. I wanted to, . . . I wanted to express that, I wanted to experience that, but I never could; and that's so sad. In a lot of respects that's part of my life that I kind of screwed up myself. It's a past part that I can't go back for. . . . The next time around, the next corner, it's going to be different. This is better than what it was yesterday; tomorrow will be better than that.

. . . I enjoy life right now, I really do. I am actually starting to enjoy life even though I'm starting to close down on one side, I'm kind of peeking on the upside. . . . I have reached the point where I can look back to my childhood and see and actually experience the enjoyment I had then. I'm beginning to see and experience the joy and enjoyment of what I am getting now; plus, I have the benefit of a somewhat normal intellect to see things for what they really are and were. That door is opened.

. . . It's like I said, I wouldn't want to go through this again, but I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience. It's one of those things that is difficult to understand. I wouldn't want my children to ever go through it, yet I sit back and I have to think of my father. I'm sure my father probably joked around with some of his friends and peers, "I'll never let my son go in the military. I'll break both of his legs." It wasn't the case. It's one of those things. But it's nice to be here and to be able to experience it. It's been a long

time. I've denied myself for a lot of years of having this. In honesty, that's sad in itself; but it's myself so I can't blame anybody else.

. . . [To maintain my psychological health and well being] I just deal with life one day at a time, remembering where I came from, where I was, and those few people that helped me along the lines to where I am now. . . . I realize that tomorrow is going to be an exceptional day in the fact that I will learn something else new. . . . That's the best way that I can express it. Life's a learning process. I stopped living for twenty years, so in a sense I'm enjoying those late adolescent early adult years I didn't get to back in the late '60's. That's the way I see it, pay back. I can say with all honesty a few of my acquaintances and friends are sorry as hell I'm feeling this way. They're dealing with a twenty-one year old crazy man sometimes. But that's the way I look at it. In order to maintain what I've got, I have to look at the future of what I think it should be [and] what I can do. I can't change the world. I have no desire to. I can't change the United States. I can't even change this state or this town; but I can change myself, and that's what I'm going to do.

. . . [What brings the most fulfillment or hope to me is] the knowledge of where I've been, what I've done, whom I've been with, where I'm going and what I'm able to do--which is unlimited. I found that out because I'm still a kid, you understand? And of course I have my children, and I'm immensely proud of them. They consume the vast majority of my time, as far as my thoughts and efforts for them, because I want to provide them, obviously, with a betterment of what I had. I would love to provide them with a world that is at peace, but I can't. So I do the best I can.

. . . I screwed up. I've wasted a lot of years by not coming forward and doing what I should have done- asking for help--[and] thinking I was something other than what I was. Honesty, that's the key phrase. When you are honest with yourself, everything else falls into place. Well, I've finally learned to be honest with myself again, and it's wonderful. It really is. It's so damn freeing; I don't have to worry about what I've said or

putting on "airs" pretending to be something else. . . . This is what you get. This is me. If you don't like it, it's your problem!

. . . I knew the entire time something wasn't right, but I was naive enough to go ahead and believe it [was right]. So I, like the rest of the people, was sucked down the big black hole of bureaucracy or whatever else. I still feel good. I'm proud of what I did. I wouldn't want to go through it again; and I think that I would actually, given the same circumstances, . . . the same mental foul-ups, I would try for it to *not* be allowed again. But we're looking at . . . a span of what 26 plus years, basically, a quarter of a century of a learning process here. So in one respect, I suppose time was on my side that I managed to live this long, so that I could see the difference.

Up until now, it was probably an on-going thought processes that required probably, I'd say, sixty percent of my thought--not conscious thought, not overtly conscious thought--but Vietnam was always in the back of my mind. Not so much Vietnam, but the emphasis of always sitting in the back corner of a restaurant, always facing the open area, [and] never allowing anyone behind you [was in the back of my mind]. Even going out walking through the lovely woods with a girlfriend, I couldn't enjoy because I'm always watching the area.

But now I understand that, and I can enjoy life now. It's going to be considerably shorter than it was before, but it's different now that I can put all this nonsense behind me. And I understand it from the standpoint [of] "Yeah, unfortunately I was there. Things happened that were unfortunate." I also see that . . . in order for me to get to this point, I personally had to go through all this other nonsense. . . . to be here now. I couldn't have done it at any other point in time. It would not have been real to me. I had to accept all of the problems, all of the foul-ups, and deal with them and understand them in order to be here now. So life is a constant process, even when its a pain in the ass. Much like a tunnel, the other end is over there; you have to keep going.

. . . Coming back when I was in . . . graduate school, . . . the only people that I associated with were veterans because they're the only ones that really understood. Of course in the '70's, . . . the climate was not, shall I say, progressively kind to Vietnam veterans anyway, for one reason. But even after that, I've always gravitated toward the veteran because there's a closeness among the combat vets that nobody will ever know what it's like, because they weren't there. Very very few civilians have tried to--or wanted to--get involved within that "netherworld" that we all live in, either for boredom, or it frightens the hell out of them. . . . People don't take very well to the . . . morbid humor that was *our* humor over there. I mean things that make you sick now, *that* was humorous. It makes me sick just thinking about them, just about.

But it's amazing, the transformation from the logical, rational, thinking human being to the animal you become in combat. Amazing! And I can understand, only recently understand, where the vast majority of civilians are coming from when they want no part of us. One, that they don't understand; two, it is frightening; and three, a lot of them just don't care. So one tends to gravitate with people that understand you. That's why there are classes of Veterans that tend to stay with veterans and do not allow civilians in. Because . . . it's in his field [of experience] looking out at an outsider; because they have nothing to contribute and understand, to begin with.

Then, on the other hand, the veterans, particularly the Vietnam veterans, do not know how to act like civilians. I mean, I've been in dinner parties and things and brought up subjects that stopped the whole party. I mean, no more dinner, forget it. [I've] had people look at you like, "Where's the straight jacket?" I can understand that now, but then I just [thought], "Well why not? That's part of it. This was funny to me, for you asked the question. You said you wanted to know. Do you really want to know now?" That's what upset me a lot at first- these so called pseudo well-meaning civilians who would say, "Well, how can we help you? Tell me what happened." You tell them; they get sick, and they disassociate themselves from you.

. . . You have young people that go off to war as young people. Those that return alive are different. They're scarred forever, forever! And the people left back here will *never* understand that. I don't care how good they try to be, or how much they want to be, they will never understand. That is sad, but that's the price we paid for war, I guess.

. . . From the standpoint of combat vets, that's not just veterans but actual combat vets--you've heard the term, "warmongers?" That's bullshit! Your combat veteran is so antagonistic against war it's pathetic, because he's lived through it. We've seen it up close and personally--the hell, the deprivation, the depravity. "War is hell," General Sherman was quite correct. We don't want any part of that, but here again it's a necessary evil within life. Once you're associated with this [fact of the reality of war], then, for whatever reason, you become somewhat dissociated with the people that stayed behind for the very reason that they don't understand, or do not want to understand. Very very often, as I found the last twenty plus years, you can't relate to them because there's been a huge chasm created that neither one can bridge.

That's why when you asked me before, 15 years ago I wouldn't even have talked to you. 15 years ago, I'd have laughed in your face, literally. "Go away!" [I would have said]. [I'm talking with you now because] I've changed. . . . Having gone through all this nonsense, this hell, . . . there has been a learning process, and I've finally put it [Vietnam] aside. I felt when the subject was broached by you, [about] what you're trying to do with this, I wanted to be a part of it because I now could be relatively free to relate to someone, in some respect. . . . I would hope it would help others.

I don't want to see kids go off to war, but it's going to happen. I'd go myself if I could. I think I've said it before, I'll break both my sons legs before they can join the Marine Corps. But then again, I don't know that I will; I doubt that I will. As a father right now, that's the way I feel because I know what war's like. I know how a young person can be scarred by that; not physically killed or damaged, but just emotionally scarred which in fact is actually even worse because you're alive. [You are] living with

your problem, and there's no one there to help you. So you're in a living hell. I've been there. Does that answer your question? That's why I'm here, I don't want anybody else to go through it.

. . . Well, I have a future now I didn't have before. I feel good about it. I don't know where it's going to go or how I'm going to get there; but there's something out there, and I'm looking forward to it. The future that I am currently dealing with, of course, is my kids. I want to see them go well through school and college and things like that. I want to be able to help them deal with the issues of life I know they will be facing. I can better do that now because I'm not a chameleon. That in itself is a freeing process.

I guess you'd say even though I've lost probably 20 plus years of actual time of hiding from myself, that time can be compressed into something of use. Whatever I do is going to be done honestly; good, bad, or indifferent. I'll make an honest choice to do or not do something because I'm not playing the part for somebody else to do something. That's freeing in itself I don't know outside of that; at least I have a future now I didn't have before.

. . . I couldn't think beyond, at the most, a few days. Planning? There was no point to it. I could not, literally, it was inconceivable. Oh, I could plan down the road, but that's the chameleon part. But honestly, I had no future. Getting the garbage out [gave my future back to me]-which was doing that book. I think that was pretty much God's kindness of, "OK, you won't open up to anybody else. Why don't we try doing this, Glen?" It worked because that's my story. . . all the issues that I refused to raise with even myself and certainly with counselors. . . . What the hell do they know about it, particularly in their structured little plan game?

It was a freeing process. I had to deal with it. Once I had to deal with it, in some cases I couldn't deal with it, even myself, because we're talking about a large passage of time here. Then I had to go seek people, and I found that I could. At that point of time, I could see the problem and face this problem. "OK, who do I go to see to do this? [I'll] go

to see someone, all right, Joe Blow." [I would admit] "I've got this problem here." Then, it could be dealt with on a one-to-one basis, and I can be helped; but it wasn't until I was faced with actually seeing that problem.

A lot of this stuff that came out from doing that book, I had suppressed. . . . I had "consciously forgotten." It was buried in my subconscious. . . .It was all still damaging because it was all there. It was all still gnawing away. It was all still a part of my life that wasn't functioning, but it was not a conscious part. A goodly part of my conscious life was non-existent anyway. I was existing; I wasn't living. That's something I found kind of disgusting to exist and not live. I've missed so much by just existing!

. . . It wasn't until after a while I did [realize that I was just existing] and then it became kind of a joke to myself. It was a joke in bad taste because *I'm* actually doing this to myself-- "You big dummy, how can you do this to yourself?" Well I didn't know how I could do myself that way because the issues that were causing it had not been dealt with yet. I was just existing; I had no future. The only past I had was Vietnam. That's what was so unfortunate. . . for a lot of the combat vets that are on the street. . . . They are starting to loose their marbles. The only past they had was Vietnam. And for those that are in mental institutions, they are living in that past. Yes, [living in the past] deprives them of life. That's sad.

Tim

. . . I was born in the mid 1940s in North Carolina. My father was a doctor (he's retired now). At the time [of my birth] he was in the Army, a doctor in the Army. He was shipped overseas to Europe probably about a year and a half after I was born. From the time I was probably about a year and half old to the time I was about four, we lived with my father's parents while he was overseas, in North Carolina. When he came back we moved to another city in North Carolina, and he got a job as a doctor at the VA Hospital there. He worked there until he retired.

I went to a public elementary school. This was prior to integration. Although the city was about, at that point, 40% Black, the school was all White. The Black's went to a different school. But we lived in neighborhoods that were fairly near Black neighborhoods, and so we played together on the playground and stuff like that.

There was nothing really traumatic in terms of childhood; I wasn't abused verbally, physically, or anything like that. I was well cared for. My father made a decent income; we didn't want for anything. We moved outside of the city limits proper to the suburb when I was in seventh grade.

I went to the high school in the little town where we lived that was called Middletown. It was basically a farming community. [If one combined] the entire four. . . [grades] of the high school, I think there probably weren't more than 200 people in school. I can remember in the fall when the fire station's sirens would go off and half the guys in class would get up and leave because they were volunteer firemen and things like that. In the spring, lots of people weren't in school for a couple of weeks because of planting and things like that.

I wasn't terribly athletic. I didn't play any sports when I was in high school other than just pick-up games. I was in a lot of plays, theater productions, and I really enjoyed that. I dated. I wasn't girl crazy, but I certainly wasn't shy for not being around them. I did the usual kind of things: going to football games, dances, cruising. I guess my life at that point was very much like the movie "American Graffiti."

. . . I went to college and was there four years. I was very active in theater and also very, very active in civil rights protesting. I did a lot of voter registration drives. I organized sit-ins in Southern Virginia and North Carolina . . . through church organizations. I wasn't particularly religious, but I was using those as a vehicle to the civil rights thing. Because I got involved in a lot of those kinds of activities, I usually flunked a course or two each regular school year and then came back in the summer to make up the credits. This went on for four years and four summers.

I flunked the last course of the last summer and it was very interesting. . . . I always did well on papers, and stuff like that, but just never studied for a test. I had a "C" average going into the exam. I took the exam. He graded the papers, turned them into the Registrar's Office and took off for New Zealand on a Friday afternoon. Graduation was on Sunday afternoon (this was a summer session in August). The way I found out I wasn't graduating was when I went to pick up my cap and gown; my name was scratched off the list.

Meanwhile, my father and mother had come down for the graduation ceremony. My mother had just gotten out of the hospital. She had had breast cancer. The senior year I was in high school, she had a radical mastectomy. . . . She was in remission for a while but then, about the middle of my junior year in college, it set into her bones and internal organs. . . . So at that point, she was kind of in and out of the hospital a lot. So she had just gotten out of the hospital, in part, because she wanted to come and see me graduate. She came down in a wheelchair and the whole bit. They were in the motel room getting ready to come to my graduation ceremony when I came over to tell them they didn't need to bother. It was a pretty traumatic scene. That was in August of '66. I was drafted into the Army within 45 days after that. I couldn't get a decent job because I was draft-bait and everybody knew it. Obviously I couldn't go off to graduate school, I hadn't finished college. The college had a rule that if you'd been there 10 semesters and hadn't graduated in four regular years . . . then you could never come back there. So, I was kind of betwixt-and-between.

. . . I have a brother who's about four and a half years younger than me. When we were growing up, until the time we moved out to the suburb, we were pretty close. I mean, not that we were always close, but we tended to play together just because there weren't too many other kids my age or his age in the neighborhood where we lived at first. . . . When we moved out to the suburb, we lived on a street where everything was built pretty much all at once. . . . On the street there were about forty houses, and of the forty

houses, there was probably something of 113 kids living there. There were a lot of kids my age and also a lot of kids his age. So at that point we tended to kind of drift into our own groups. I picked on him and he picked on me, and it was the usual kind of childhood horseplay, but we got along well.

. . . My father and I had what we always used to call *kitchen table discussions*. My father was always fairly low-keyed. You could talk to him about anything; [he] didn't get very flustered. If I had done something that he didn't approve of, we never really thrashed it out in the heat of the moment.

. . . I can remember coming home when I was in high school one night, drunk and falling [down]. My friends carried me, literally, up to the front door. We rang the bell. They left. I fell onto the hallway floor. He got me up. This was probably about one or two o'clock in the morning. He put me in the bathtub so if I threw up . . . I wasn't going to choke on my own vomit. . . . [He'd] let me sleep there. [He] got up the next day [and he] didn't say anything then. Later that night or the next day, he said, "Why don't we talk?" So we sat down and talked. These kinds of talks always happen at the kitchen table which is why we called it *the kitchen table discussions*. The tenor of these things was always sort of, "How do you feel about what you did?" and, "Do you see anything wrong with what you did?" and, "How do you think it made other people feel?" So I suppose to some extent he was sharp enough to know that he could do that and maybe make me trip off my own guilt and correct my behavior on the basis of how it was affecting others. . . . So I always felt like I could talk with him.

We also had big philosophical discussions and . . . he might play "devil's advocate" or I may play "devil's advocate." I'm famous for doing that just to get into a good discussion about the pros and cons of something. My mother used to get terribly frustrated because one of us, either he or I--or sometimes when my brother when he got older--would participate in these. We were always jumping up from the kitchen table to go

get the dictionary, the encyclopedia, or something like that [to have] the final word to prove a point.

My mother was the more emotional one; not that she couldn't discuss things rationally, but she was one more [prone] to react in the heat of the moment sort of thing. She was probably the more open one in the sense that you could read her better in the terms of how she was reacting to something, her emotions.

. . . My father was one who you weren't sure how to read or how he was reacting to something at the moment. It would come out more as a rational sort of thing at the discussion. I guess though the main memory I have of my father, particularly when I was younger, . . . prior to high school, was that he would get home late from the hospital, usually not until about 6 or 7 o'clock. We'd have dinner. He'd wash dishes until I got older, then I was washing dishes. Then he would go sit in the chair in the living room and read medical journals and textbooks and things like that pretty much until just about bed time; whereas, my mother would be more the one puttering around the house and out into the yard.

. . . So in some respects, I felt like if I wanted to talk about or thrash out something that I really wanted some kind of immediate reaction to, or emotional kind of reaction to, I would do that with my mother. But if I wanted to step back and bask in the cool light of reason, I would probably talk about it with my father. . . . My mother was much more of a touchy-feely emotional type and my father was more of the rational type. But it was evident that both of them cared very much about me and what was happening to me.

I remember one of my father's favorite expressions was that you raise your children to leave you; and what he meant by that is: once a child reaches a certain age--and it's probably younger than the parent would like to think--you don't really have an awful lot of control over what decisions they are going to make. All you can hope is that you've inculcated them with the value systems so that they can make decent choices once they start making them on their own. And that stuck with me. I think there's a lot of truth to that.

. . . I think, certainly, my father was [influential in my personal development] in terms of the kitchen table discussions, just seeing that as a way that proved to be a valuable approach . . . [in shaping] . . . who I was and [teaching me] how I impacted upon other people. I also feel my mother was important because she could keep me in touch with the touchy side. It's not sufficient just to be able talk about what you're doing, you have to be able to walk the talk you're always talking. There were two or three friends I had, particularly in high school and some in college. I felt the kind of discussions we had and the kind of relationship we had [helped to shape me]. Some of [the discussions were] . . . intellectual and some [were] . . . just kind of typical adolescent bonding. I suppose it made me who I am.

. . . I keep a journal. I have done so ever since high school. I keep it pretty faithfully. I usually write in it every day or every other day. . . . I get the shakes to write. That's been a great tool [for] self reflection--if nothing else--and for recording things . . . [so that] you kind of go back and check . . . [when] you're not sure . . . [if the story] was real or . . . imagined.

. . . I think that the church was probably important in my upbringing; although, I don't think it was in any real formal sense. I had a couple of experiences with openly rebelling against churches that I was a member of as I was growing up. For instance, in one case, I was raised a Methodist. In this particular Methodist church that I was going to they had--at one point in the service--a 10 or 15 minute kind of quiet reflective time. People could stand up and say something if they wanted.

So we were doing this one particular Sunday . . . [when] I stood up and said that I really felt this was all sham, that the people in church who seemed to be running things seemed to be more interested in refurbishing the organ and what the flowers are going to be like on the altar and the budget and that sort of thing. . . . I was probably about a junior in high school. Civil rights was beginning to be a bigger thing and I really didn't see that this church was at all involved in anything that made any difference as far as humanity was

concerned. They weren't involved in civil rights, they weren't involved in any other kinds of issues. They weren't sending any volunteers anywhere, in any kind of a missionary sense, domestic or abroad. I didn't want to be a part of that and I quit. So I got up and walked out. Of course my parents were highly embarrassed. My mother flew into a rage as soon as they got out the church door. My father and I had some kitchen table discussions about it for about three days, but they didn't force me to go back to church or anything like that.

. . . Up until the time I went to college, I don't really feel like there was that much of a challenge. I never seemed to have any difficulty getting along with other kids. I never had any problems in terms of my relationship with my father or my mother or brother or other relatives. I never was one who felt particularly shy around girls. I suppose the biggest thing was not being called a "nerd." But I wasn't athletic. At that time in high school, there was a lot of stereotyping around whether you were a jock or a bookworm, that kind of stuff. So I suppose my biggest challenge was just try to be, or to appear to be, well rounded.

. . . I really felt that my father was interested in my opinion and perspective and gave [them] credence. . . . My mother would be the one who would be home when I came home from school. I would say, "Ma, guess what happened at school today?" She was probably the most attentive simply because she was there and heard my stories. I would tell them the second time when dad got home. To the little day-to-day bumps-and-scrapes type stories, [the] highs and lows, I think she had a much better conception of me--on *that* kind of level--than my father did. [This was] simply because my father wasn't around as much. But I think my father probably had a much better conception of me as a rational being, than my mother did, simply because my father was usually the one who had the kitchen table discussions. My mother might try and be there in the kitchen or in the background, or occasionally would be participating, but by-and-large, it was me and dad

talking together. So I'd say that I was heard and understood by both of them but probably in different ways.

. . . It always felt very good to me that he would take the time and make the effort to try to really understand what I wanted to say. . . . It always impressed me that neither one was ever the type to just hand you down some kind of [dictate such as], "This was it! We're the parents and you have to obey the rules."

. . . I was never a hunter. I went hunting once with a friend of mine. This was probably when I was about 13. We had BB guns, and there was woods near where we lived. We went out, and we were going to be squirrel hunters. I can remember shooting the squirrel and actually hitting it, which surprised the hell out of me. It probably wasn't more than about 15 feet away when I shot him. The thing screamed like crazy! I didn't realize squirrels could scream. Obviously, I hadn't killed it. It fell out of the tree, and it was writhing around on the ground by the trunk of the tree and not dying immediately like he was supposed to . . . like victims always do in movies. My friend and I are standing over this thing watching it. I'm horrified with what I've done. He's saying, "You can't just let it stay in misery. You've got to kill it!" I couldn't do it, [so] he shot it from probably about a foot away. [He] just kind of held the BB gun over its head and obviously cracked its scull pretty good at that point. And that certainly was something that stuck with me and had repercussions later when I got to Nam. [I] never hunted again and never even loaded the BB gun again after that.

. . . My father was a doctor. He worked mainly with veterans. All the people who were veterans mostly were World War II veterans at that point. I used to go to the hospital every now and then and spend time just hanging out there and talking with some of the veterans. Some of them would talk about war experiences and stuff. So I think I probably had some feelings about that [war] before I ever experienced it myself, and just the general idea of a doctor--[of] being one who's supposed to heal. . . . [Then] I wound up becoming a medic when I was in the service. It's just a whole dichotomy that revolved around that. .

. . Here we are supposed to be killing people, but I'm a medic. I'm supposed to help heal people.

. . . My father had been in World War II. He's not one who ever wanted to talk about his experiences very much. In fact, to this day, he's only talked about things because I've asked him; and, it's been largely cursory--Hemingway kind of stuff [such as]: "This is where we were. This is who the people were. This is what the weather was like." And [he did] not [share] a whole lot about his individual feelings or reactions to what he did. He was a surgeon in the hospital and was caught in the "Battle of the Bulge" area. [He] saw some pretty raw stuff.

None of the other options, other than getting drafted, really appealed to me very much. I did feel, to some extent, that kind of sense of duty. I mean my country feels that this is what I should do, [and therefore] I should do it; although, I certainly wasn't very happy about it. My father never tried to dissuade me from that, based upon the war-is-hell type experiences that [he knew of]. So I think I probably just kind of drifted into it because I didn't choose to proactively do anything about any of the other options.

After I came back, he and I talked more about this. . . . It was a very different war. I probably wouldn't have felt bad about fighting in World War II. . . . And so, when we've talked about it since, it's been more kind of comparing notes in terms of what the hospital I was in was like as compared to what the hospital he was in was like and troop patterns and things like that. [The discussions were] not so much necessarily emotional things which is interesting, in light of the fact that we always *used to* have these kitchen table discussions. I, to this day, am not sure whether that's his reluctance or mine; or, rather if it's just an area that ... we're not sure we want to keep digging into.

. . . I think he was proud to say I was doing the right thing. I don't think he would have felt very good about me being one who burned my draft card and went to Canada, or, being an active resister. . . . I think he probably felt a certain amount of secret pride that I was just going to go and do my duty, so to speak. We never really talked about it much

one way or the other. It's just one of those inevitable things that was happening to people in those days.

. . . She [My mother] obviously wasn't happy about it. I mean [I was] "her son," sort of thing. She was experiencing a lot of physical pain and was facing death and knew that there were obviously certain parallels between what she was going through and what she was afraid I might go through. And so, she certainly wasn't very happy about it. She was pretty upset about it actually, but didn't see anything she could do about it. And so [she] just kind of--again--resigned herself to it.

. . . [My preconceptions of war, from talking with vets at my father's job, was] that it was mostly dirty, that [in war] you wind up carrying around too much stuff that weighs too much, that it was very boring until something happened; then it was extremely exciting, a rush--not necessarily exciting but an adrenaline-pumping sort of thing--that in many cases, whatever you experience, you almost deny the experience in order to be able to cope with it. . . . Some of these [guys my father worked with] have been mentally affected by what they used to call "shell shock". . . . They would talk about things they had done or seen and just [about the general] kind of the impressions. . . . What I gathered from that is that you spent an awful lot of time slogging through the mud, being bored, carrying too much stuff, and all of a sudden everything starts happening. Then, 15 minutes later, it's over and you're just thankful to be breathing in and breathing out at that point. I don't think I had any kind of glamorous vision of being a soldier. . . .

. . . I remained a virgin all the way through it [Vietnam]. I had a girlfriend whom I had gone with all the way through college. She went to a different college than I did, three or four states away. We would see each other in summers. . . . I was engaged to my first wife at the time that I got sent over to Vietnam. We decided to defer getting married until after I got back in case I didn't get back, and [also]--in part--because she was Catholic and . . . we felt like it wouldn't be the right thing to do. We never made love (nor had I with any other girl). When I think about the fact that I could have gotten blown away and had

never experienced that [making love], I think I must have been crazy. . . . If I had my life to live over again, that's the one thing I'd probably do differently.

. . . I guess about the only word that would describe it [Vietnam] would just be *overwhelming*. Not so much just in terms of the horrors, like say "Apocalypse Now." Certainly there was plenty of that. But really just kind of making me--at least in part while I was there and certainly for some time afterwards, and probably it still goes on--rethink who I am, what I stand for and what I would do if faced with a similar situation, now that I've already been through a situation like that. How I'd respond to it this time, as opposed to how I responded to it then (probably with a certain amount of naivete that I wouldn't have at this point). Basically I'm a story teller. So I can tell you stories, if you like, about my experience there.

. . . The way I entered the military was I flunked out of college in August of '66. This was at a time when they were drafting about 40,000 people a month. Nobody was going to hire me for any kind of significant job because everybody knew I was draft bait. So I was just working a nothing job in the town where I had gone to school and waiting for the draft notice to come, which it did. . . . So between the time I flunked out of college and the time I was in the service was less than two months. I went to basic training in Fort Brag, North Carolina and finished up there just before Christmas. [My] next duty station was Fort Sam Houston in Texas for medic training. I got about ten days off between the time basic was over.

. . . So I was home. That was the time when my mother was in terminal stages of cancer [and] was in the hospital. I remember spending a lot of time at the hospital. She wasn't coherent most of the time. I remember being there one night, this must have been in the wee hours of the morning. She kind of woke up but wasn't coherent. . . . [She shared]how she hadn't been able to see me graduate from college. She was all upset about that sort of thing. And she never was very lucid for any length of time for me to talk to her before I had to leave for Fort Sam.

. . . Then they blew a big part of the hospital compound up over in Nam, so that delayed it further. So it was May of '68 when I finally shipped out and went over there.

. . . The hospital unit we were supposed to go to wasn't quite finished yet, so they gave us about a day to settle in. The first three weeks we were attached to the 91st Evac Hospital which was in Bien Hoa. This was a pretty huge hospital. We worked on wards there until we went down to Can Tho which is in the Mekong delta. That's where my unit was, so we were down there. I guess I was there for pretty much the middle of June until I got out of the service (which was in October of '68). We were part of the "win the hearts and minds of the people" sort of program. We had American Corps men and American doctors and nurses. We also started getting Vietnamese doctors and Vietnamese nurses and Vietnamese orderlies in there, working along side of us because the eventual goal was to turn the hospital over to the Vietnamese.

In addition to seeing military patients, we also got a lot of civilians. Basically anybody who got hurt in the area got sent to our hospital. So it made for an interesting trip because you got to meet a lot more of the Vietnamese on non-combatant terms then if you were just out doing patrols. You got to see a lot more of what their customs were . . . and kind of make friends with some of them. For instance, when anybody Vietnamese was injured, especially if it was like the father or the son, or the brother, . . . when he came into the hospital, usually half the family moved in with them. If he was a young guy, his mother would come. Or if he was married, his wife would come and she would sleep under the bed, under him, and half the family would be out in the compound with their tents set up. [The family would also bring] the goats and the chickens and the cook pots and things like that. So it was a real kind of zoo scene in terms of that sort of thing. It made it much more interesting than just doing solely military stuff. We also went to all the little villages around Can Tho. Can Tho was the province capital. . . . We'd go around in kind of a leap-frog fashion through all the little villages around Can Tho and do sick calls and things like that [to] build some morale.

. . . The Captain who was in charge of our unit, was a decent guy. He wasn't a hard ass, he was fair. . . . And most of the non-coms [non-comissioned officers] we had were pretty good. I'd say morale was basically pretty good. I mean, we saw ourselves as kind of a professional medical unit. We didn't think of ourselves as combatants that much. Given the nature of the war and the time we were there, we had to do some of that. So for the most part, I'd say it was pretty good. Because we all went over as a unit . . . we had gotten to know each other pretty well over a year stateside. And it was the same cast of characters when we were there. So we all knew each other pretty well. Morale was [good]. We had good relationships.

. . . I had to kill a guy while I was there. We had to pull our own guard duty on this hospital compound. We were supposed to have an ARVN Unit (the Army Republic of Vietnam) do the guard duty for us, but we got there right after the Tet Offensive and so things were still fairly "hot" in the bush. This Army unit [ARVN] was out and still being hammered by Charlie. So until they could get clear of that, we had to pull our own guard duty. Our compound was built on re-claimed marshland. They had cleared it with Agent Orange and then filled it in and built on it. The back end of it stuck out into a kind of a dog-legged marshland. There was a fairly big air base next to us. This routinely got a lot of mortar attacks and rocket attacks as they'd walk things in on the air base. Occasionally the VC would raid the place.

. . . So me and this friend of mine, I'll call him Mick, we had been together at Fort Sam Houston. He was born on the same day I was, probably about hours apart. We got to be really good friends. He and I would always pull guard duty together. We would always volunteer for the back wall, the one that was at the marsh. It was a low sand bag wall that came up a little less then waist height. We volunteered for this place because nobody really wanted to come down there because it was fairly close to the marsh. So we'd go down there and smoke dope and walk guard.

So we were out walking guard one night. We'd split and go down from the middle and go down to the corners and then turn and come back toward each other. The distance was probably about 100 to 124 yards from corner to corner. So we'd come back and we would hunker down behind a wall and have a cigarette and smoke the rest of the roach. This was probably about 2:00 o'clock in the morning. . . . So we're walking back toward each other. You couldn't see shit out in this marsh. I mean it was really dark. I could hear something out there so I kind of hunkered down behind the wall. There was enough moonlight that I could see movement out there. It was probably about 15 or 20 VC heading towards the air base which was off the dogleg from us. They weren't heading for us, they were heading for the air base. I certainly wasn't going to start anything. So I was just kind of watching this go on.

Mick was kind of this gung ho, John Wayne type. . . . If something was going to happen, he was going to participate. So he's coming back and he sees them. He had taken his flak jacket off because it was hot. All of a sudden I hear firing. He's coming along the wall and shooting out into the marsh. At that point, most of the VC had gotten close enough to the wire around the air base that they were starting to crawl under that. It looked like they were mainly trying to do a sapper attack or something like that. They weren't shooting a lot . . . until Mick started. He starts shooting. They start shooting at the air base. Then the air base people start shooting at the VC. All of a sudden I noticed this VC out in the marsh. He's probably no more than 30 yards from us . . . and he's kind of angling toward us. He doesn't see me but he sees Mick. I could see he's getting ready, he's taking a bead on Mick. So I'm yelling at Mick to get down! Mick doesn't hear me and he's not having any of it anyway.

So Mick gets shot. He gets shot about here [points to his body] and it goes under his rib cage. When it comes out in the back, it tears a big hole and tears part of his spine out. I saw him get hit and I saw him kind of fly back and then land on the sand. At this point I'm not really standing up all the way but I'm up enough over the wall that the VC

could see me. I could see they could see me. So he's [the VC] turning to shoot me and I just shot. [I] hit him. I emptied about half a clip. After the muzzle flash, he's not there anymore. So I ducked down below the wall and skidded over towards Mick who's got a big hole in his back. I could see his intestines looking like overcooked sausage with little pieces of bone in it. I knew he got hit in the spine, so I get on the squawky talkie and I called for a medic, which was really weird. I mean, here we are in the middle of this hospital compound and I'm having to call for a medic.

So two guys come running out with a liter and they scoop him up and take him off. At that point, I'm out there by myself so I called the guards. "I'm not staying out here by myself," [I said]. So he said he sent two other guys out and had me come back in. But he wanted me to stay there because I had to do another shift's guard later.

So I go out to the Emergency Room to see if I can figure out what's happened to Mick. They wouldn't let me in at that point. They had him on the table and were debriding tissue. They had to operate on him and get the shell fragments out. So I go back to the guard thing thinking about him, [wondering] what's going to happen to him.

I'm thinking about this guy that I saw not 20 yards in front of the muzzle of my weapon and I just pulled the trigger. They spark a lot, the muzzle flashes, so [it] kind of destroys your night vision. Then when it dies out, the guy's not there. . . . I figured I hit him but I didn't know if he was wounded or dead or what.

So after guard duty, I went back [to my barracks] and couldn't sleep. I just kind of hung around the barracks a little while. [I] went and had several cups of coffee. I looked at the food and went outside and threw up. [I] went back to the hospital. Mick was out of the operation. [He] was in what would be intensive care, but he hadn't really come around yet so I couldn't really find out anything. They said they got all the bullet fragments out and the wound itself was going to be okay. They weren't sure what the damage was going to be in terms of what happened to his spine. They didn't know if he was going to be paralyzed or not.

. . . I didn't have anything else to do. . . . I just had to do something [because] I just couldn't keep thinking about this. So I went down to the ward and just asked the ward Sergeant there [if there was anything I could do]. I said, "I need something to do. I'll put in some extra time or whatever." And he said, "They need some people down at the graves because there had been a fair amount of injuries over at the air base, mostly VC. . . . They were having to gather up supplies. There were also some GI's killed." He said, "I was going to assign you there for tonight anyway because we're understaffed at this point for what was happening. And there had been some fire fights out in the bush."

. . . So I went down to graves and reported. The Sergeant said [that] we have to go out to the marsh to do the count and get the bodies. We got out to the marsh. I had to pick up this guy that I shot. He's lying face up in the marsh. He's got one entry wound in his groin and two in his chest and one under his eye. His eye is kind of hanging down like a marble on a string. . . . So we picked the guy up and his brains fell out into the marsh from an exit wound in his head. This was real pleasant. So we get this guy and several other Vietnamese back into the ward we're using for graves registration.

We lay him out on the table. The procedure is that military intelligence wants you to check to see if there was any kind of papers on him or anything like that. While we were out in the field we'd take usually just a long stick or weapon, or something like that, and poke him and turn him just to make sure they are not booby trapped by their buddies . . . I tell the Sergeant, "This is the guy I killed." He said, "You don't have to do this one if you don't want. You can give it to someone else." I said, "No, I got him this far, might as well take him the rest of the way."

So we're cutting his clothes off of him. In his pants pocket he's got a bag and he's got what looks like papers. So we open that up. He had some kind of like village ID card. . . . I'm the only one there at this point with this guy. The Sergeant had gone on and done something else. He had a picture in the wallet, or in the bag, and it was a picture of a woman and a girl probably about seven or eight years old. I mean, obviously it was his

wife and daughter. The woman's all dressed up in one of those silk ao dai type outfits. The girl's got on a white communion dress. . . . It was pretty obvious that this was what this was. She was holding an old rosary and stuff like that. On the back is some writing in Vietnamese. After we do this, we're supposed to turn all this stuff over to MI.

. . . I just wasn't going to give them the picture. I just stuck the picture in between his hands, taped his hands together and just put it in the bag. At that point they just take him over and bulldoze him in the ditch basically at the edge of the marsh. I killed this guy, and I had to; I mean I guess I didn't have to, but I did. It's just, finding that picture is just--this guy's a person. He's got a wife. He's got a kid. That just really brought it home a lot more than if it was just somebody who was shot and didn't have to deal with that sort of thing. So that's the picture I remember of the war. I mean, I can still see that picture of that woman and that kid and I can still see his eyeball hanging down by a thread. . . .

. . . Within about a day or two, when he [Mick] was stabilized, they put him on a bird and sent him off to Okinawa. I got a letter from him about three weeks later. After that, he was in a VA Hospital in Texas. My father had worked in a VA Hospital; they're not exactly the best care in the world. [Did] you ever see the movie "Born the Fourth of July"? That's fairly real.

He was married, and he didn't have any kids. We wrote each other a couple of times before I got out of the service. We had planned that when we got out (we were supposed to get out about the same time), I was going to come down to Texas for our birthdays. We were just going to have a real blow out. His wife had a sister and things weren't working out with my fiancee. The sister would be available for me. So I couldn't not go see this guy.

He was still in the VA Hospital after I got out. We went down there. He was progressing pretty well in terms of--he was paralyzed from the waist down--being able to use the wheel chair and all, even though he looked like a wreck. So we were able to get him a two-day pass. So we loaded Mick up in his wheelchair and wheeled him out of the

VA. . . . We went down and just got thoroughly drunk. He looked like he was doing all right, but he had been on a lot of drugs for pain. He had turned into an addict. When he got released from the VA Hospital he still had the habit. I went back home.

We wrote a couple of times for a year or so after I was first out. After that we just kind of lost contact. Then about two years later I got a letter from his wife. She had left him. He had really gotten into smack. She just wasn't going to go down with him. I knew he had family down there. I just hoped he was getting some help. I was at that point married and trying to become a solid citizen and I suppose was kind of distancing myself, for my own self-protection, from a lot of this. I didn't go down there again or anything like that. About six months later I got a letter from his wife, just an envelope that was addressed by her. It just had a piece of paper in it, nothing on it. Inside the piece of paper was the obituary notice; they had found him, Mick, in a rooming house OD'd. . . . I suppose that story for me is the central story of my experience in Nam. I mean [there are] plenty of . . . others around it, but that's the main one.

. . . The first two or three years I was back, I'd have dreams about this. The dream was always me in the dark and the muzzle flash; the guy [is] in front of it, then the guy's not there sort of thing. Or . . . the picture of Mick jerking back and sitting down hard on the sand . . . just snatches like that. I knew what all that was. I mean I had other dreams too, based on other instances when I was there, but that was the main one. It was just kind of a recurring flashback of that. I didn't go talk to a shrink or anything. I knew what was happening, I guess, in terms of that. . . . I figured . . . you just don't forget this stuff. I figured it was something I was just going to have to deal with.

My way of dealing with it, for the first seven or eight years I was out of the service, was just trying very hard to be a solid citizen. . . . I got married pretty quickly after I got out of the service. [I] got a job, bought a house, put the grass in the yard and stuff like that. It reached the point where I didn't have the dreams anymore. In fact, I didn't have any dreams and still, I don't have dreams. I mean I cannot remember any dream I have.

Every now and then I'll have a dream and I won't remember it five minutes after I wake up. All I can remember about it is kind of red around the edges and it has bone in it. I know that's what it is. It's not something that is as vivid as it used to be. Other than that, I don't really have much in the way of flashbacks or anything like that.

But my attempt to become a solid citizen lasted until about the time I was 31. . . . I think not too long after I turned 30, I just kind of woke up one day and wondered: "Okay, I've got the house and got the yard and got the dog and got the job and got the wife." And all that's okay, but it's nothing really special. And the relationship with the wife was beginning to deteriorate for lots of reasons. I just I kind of thought, "If this is it, I don't know if I want to fuckin' bother anymore." So I said that I've got to make some change.

So I left the wife [which also implies] kind of leaving the church. . . . I'm on my third marriage at this point. We've been together, between living together and being married, 16 years now. So something's going right, I guess. But I spent a lot of time then just kind of walking around talking to the trees, kind of just living a double life. [I] did more drinking than I should have. . . . [I] just kind of blotted things out for about eight to ten years. I mean I was never like a serious alcoholic or anything like that, but just enough to kind of mellow you out and take the edge off every place, sort of thing. [I] was always functional in terms of being able to hold a job, but this stuff was always back there, . . . the red edges and the bone sort of thing.

About five years ago I figured I've got to deal with this because otherwise, I'm probably headed for an early grave, or, before the third marriage is going to break down or whatever. So I started writing about it. I started writing stories about my experiences and that was very helpful. I mean it didn't really bring back flashbacks; it didn't start the dreams again or anything like that. I mean I almost consciously like call up images and then just kind of dive into them, [kind of like], "What does this mean to me?" and "What can I do with this?" I'd write stories or do personal essays. . . . I've been doing that for

about four or five years now. That's been very helpful to sort it out and put some perspective on it.

. . . In my case, there were probably lots of them [positive experiences]. We saw a lot of civilians. We did sick calls in the villages. Usually we'd go to a village about once every couple weeks. For the most part this was all pretty tame. We'd go with probably six or eight medics. We'd go with an Arvin Unit that kind of acted as our guard, as opposed to an American unit. [Therefore] it was not this big military presence. If it was [there was a military presence], it was their *own* people. The Americans were the medics. Usually it was a matter of filing down some little road about mid-morning into the village. It was always very quiet going into the village. It was only one time when we had any problems in terms of that. A sniper in the tree got the guy ahead of me. You'd see the kids. A lot of it was skin diseases and open sores and sometimes war-related stuff. But most of it was just the normal kind of bad health conditions in a Third World country. A lot of it was immediately treatable or you could just do something for them (give them medications). . . . You'd come back and check on them in a couple of weeks. You could see improvement.

. . . I have a lot of good memories in terms of that. But sometimes they get mixed. Like there was an orphanage about half a mile down the road between us and Can Tho. It was an old French villa not too far from the river. There was a Buddhist Monk and a Catholic Priest who were both Vietnamese. The Catholic Priest had been to Seminary in France. . . . What they had done was to gather up all the orphans from that area (or at least a lot of them). So they'd [the orphans] be from the age of about two or three years old up to about 12 or 13. Beyond that, usually the guys were either going off and joining Charlie or joining ARVN, at that point. The women were getting pregnant before the guys left to join Charlie or join ARVN. This place was really run down. It was an old villa. The roof was falling in and the plumbing didn't work. They were short of everything [including] food.

. . . So we kind of adopted this orphanage, me and about three or four other guys to start off with. Usually we could get a Sunday off if we worked it right. So we'd go down there. We had scrounged building materials from another villa that had been blasted. We'd help repair the roof. We got a guy to come down with us from the motor pool who was good with stuff like this. He helped fix the plumbing. And then we'd usually just do something like teach them how to play baseball or something. . . . They would invariably ask us to stay for dinner. We had gotten so we'd filch food from the mess hall that was just about ready to go bad (and bandages and whatever we could take that wasn't going to be terribly missed). We'd take it down there. So this had been going on for a while. We played ball with the kids and let them eat all the food. We'd eat a little bit but, we didn't want to take too much. Over time we got to know these people as individuals. This went on for about three or four months at least.

And then one night I was working in receiving, which is like the emergency room. There had been a rocket attack. We started getting casualties in. Three quarters of these casualties are the kids from the orphanage. Charlie had rocketed the orphanage because they were starting to have this relationship with us. Charlie didn't want that. So it was like, "geez!" Would this have happened if we hadn't gotten involved with them? I mean [you] just [ask] all those kind of turmoil kind of questions. On the one hand, you feel like you're doing a good thing. Then [on the other hand] a good thing turns around and backfires against everybody. . . . Teaching these kids to throw a ball or catch it or [to] bat, you just see them get so involved in it and get all excited. Of course they have these big dark eyes and you see them start to shine. It was a good feeling when you felt like you didn't have to be a part of the destructive element of the war. You had to be there but you could try to put the best face on it and that was nice.

I have a lot of memories like that too but they'd always get tempered with some kind of irony. You're doing all this and you know everybody's having fun, everybody's getting along okay. Then, the next thing you know, they're all casualties in receiving

because they got rocketed. . . . So it was always that edge; you could never obviously escape the fact that you were in a war zone. So you just got jerked around a lot in terms of that.

. . . I didn't talk about it at all until about five or six years ago. . . . At first it was a conscious decision. I thought that I'm just going to get this part of my life behind me. I'm going to move on from here. About the time I was breaking up with my second wife I was going through a real kind of crazy time.

. . . About five years ago [I made a decision to cut way back on my alcohol and pot usage]. I didn't totally stop drinking or smoking dope or anything like that, but I don't do anywhere as much of that as I used to. It was reaching the point where I knew I was going to start having liver problems or lose all my brain cells and stuff like that. And I just decided to kind of confront it [Vietnam] on my own.

. . . First it was just really telling myself the stories in terms of writing them down. I really firmly believe that people don't know what they think until they see what they say and see what you're saying. I mean when you write something down, somehow it has some kind of objective reality that it doesn't have when it's just floating around in a Mulligan stew in your brain. It sometimes comes out differently than you thought it would. So for me, this was really a way of objectifying my own experiences.

. . . I tell stories now to anybody either through what I write or just talking about it. [I] mainly [tell] that one with the guy I shot and then my friend being shot. The grunts had a saying over there: "There it is". It usually had to do with a sense of cynicism, a sense of irony and a sense of things backfiring. . . . For me, that whole story about my friend and the guy I killed--having to go and pick him up-- . . . "there it is." So that's what it was all about: totally fuckin meaningless and you're never going to be able to make any sense of it! But *there it is*. So that's the one for me, I guess. I think in some ways, it just parallels war itself. I mean we blew away this country, I blew away this guy, and we got blown away in the process. I mean . . . as a country we got very injured. We got paralyzed by

this; my friend got paralyzed. So this story for me is kind of the Vietnam war story, I guess.

. . . Everything goes away one way or another. People leave each other. People die. Vietnam really reinforced that for me. I say "reinforce" because one of my father's favorite expressions was: "You raise your children to leave you." And what he meant by that was that, at some point . . . the children start making decisions on their own and there's not a whole lot you can do about it. They're going to take their own path. All you can really do is hope to give them a value system such that when they do start making decisions they will make ones that are good, whatever that means to them. I mean I had friends that got killed. I saw people . . . that weren't friends [die]. They're there one minute and they're not the next. . . . And then my experience since then. I mean, I've been married and divorced twice. I've had friends die since I've gotten back . . . and it just kind of reinforces that "everything goes away" business. Somehow that kind of gets twisted around with this [other] saying: "You raise people to leave you."

I find that since I've come back, I always feel the sense of separateness. I know to some extent that's probably a self-protective mechanism because everybody does go away. Even with my wife and my kids I find myself almost as if I can be a fly on the wall watching me with them. There's a sense of detachment from them. It's as if we each kind of walk around in our own little cage. You can kind of reach through the bars and talk to somebody else in their own little cage, but you can't be in the same cage with somebody else. . . . All my life feels like *that* since coming back.

. . . Two days before I left Vietnam (I was still working in the hospital that I was assigned to, the 29th EVAC), there had been a mortar attack in Can Tho, the town not far away from us. Whenever that happens the casualties come to us. A woman came in carrying a small child, the child probably wasn't more than about seven or eight months old. It was not her child. I don't know if the parents had been killed or what. The child's foot was hanging on by a thread. We weren't able to save it. [We] had to amputate the

foot. She had shrapnel wounds and some burns. I was working in receiving when they brought her in. . . . I was helping with the amputation. . . . They put her in a bed in the Orthopedics' Ward and put pillows all around her.

When I got off shift I went down to visit her to see how she was doing. She was obviously in a lot of pain. . . . She's crying all the time so I just sat down next to her and put my finger out. She grabbed my finger and was holding onto it. I just started singing a lullaby to her "rock-a-by-baby."

. . . Two days later I get on the plane and I come back home. We landed in Oakland. This was just the commercial airport. It wasn't like an Air Force Base or anything like that. We get off the plane; it's troopers that have come back on a particular plane. We were walking along on the tarmac past this chained-link fence and on the other side of the fence is a bunch of college-student types demonstrating against the war.

There's this one girl there who was wearing a tight tee-shirt and jeans with her hair in a headband. I hadn't seen any American women other than the nurses in fatigues in a long time. I was just kind of looking at her. . . . She caught my eye and I smiled. She comes up to the fence and says, "How many babies did you burn today?" or something to that effect. I just flipped out because two days earlier I had been treating this baby. [I] started climbing up over the fence and was going to get her. Some people said to get off the fence and said it's not worth an Article 15 at this point. . . . So that was my "Welcome Home."

. . . I was engaged and had plans to get married . . . so I came on back to Massachusetts. Pretty quickly after getting back, [I] went down to North Carolina, got all my stuff, and moved up to Massachusetts. My fiancee was from Massachusetts. I got a job, got an apartment and got married all within in about four weeks time. [I] just kind of settled down into working, being married, and fixing up the apartment.

I think what I was really trying to do was just be a solid citizen. It's like, "Okay, that was that and this is this. Let's go on." I didn't ever talk about what I'd done or

anything like that. I never really talked about it with my finance/wife [or] her family or friends. . . . I just tried to go on and do my life at that point.

My father-in-law was one who was a big supporter of the war; the domino theory, our country, right or wrong, all that. He had been in World War II, and I just couldn't talk to him at all about it because we would just get into these big arguments about philosophical differences. . . . My father was living down in North Carolina. He had been in World War II. By virtue of the fact that we just weren't in close contact . . . we just didn't talk about that stuff much. That only came about after I had been home about seventeen years.

So first it was just okay; life goes on. I didn't want to be anything special. . . . I got a job and I went back to school evenings. While I was working full-time I finished my degree. It took about a year and a half to do that. Then weekends were spent doing things around the apartment or whatever. [I] just kept busy. It's like *this* is what I'm supposed to do now.

. . . I guess, I really didn't know what I needed. I guess what I needed, I think probably looking back on it. . . was [to do] just what I did: put some distance on it. . . . It was all still there in my head. I had some perspective on it that I had developed even while I was there.

. . . It's a unique experience, and nobody who hasn't been in any [similar] experiences is ever truly going to understand it the way you do. What's the point in talking about it with people? I didn't really try to talk about it with my family or friends, or anything like that. There weren't guys that I knew in the area because Worcester was not my home town. I had moved up here from the South. I didn't spend any time back in North Carolina and see guys that I had known from high school or college. . . who had been veterans. I didn't have that kind of network up here at that point. There really wasn't much in the way of support groups either, inside the VA or outside the VA. After all, the war was still going on. . . . I'm not a joiner, anyway, of groups, so. . . . I think what I

really wanted to do was just put it behind me, get some distance on it. So I guess I got what I wanted in a sense.

. . . I was working at a local college in 1971 as Assistant Dean of Students. I had been there on the job four days when the Marines came up to recruit. This was when we were in the middle of the bombing of Cambodia. All the student demonstrations were reasonably hyped. The Marines had a table outside on a verandah of the student center. . . . The students had decided to hold a silent vigil in protest of [the war]. . . . They were supposed to keep a lane open about six feet away from the table so that anybody who did want to come and see the Marines about recruitment [could].

. . . As Assistant Dean of Students, I was supposed to--me and a couple of other guys--make sure this happened, in terms of keeping this aisle open, keeping this space between the demonstrators and the Marines. Well, I think about in a half-hour's time the lane closed up. The students were right up at the edge of the table nose-to-nose with the Marines on the other side. There was just enough of them, so that there was no way you're going to keep this [aisle] open. If [you] tried to, it was going to get confrontational. So the Dean of Students decided that as long as they didn't do anything more than stand around the table it was okay. . . . I'm standing there at the corner of this table with students all around me, and Marines on my elbow, thinking this is so surreal for me. Because I feel exactly like the students do. Meanwhile, [I'm] having to protect the Marines.

So at that point, I got involved for a little while [in politics], [for] about six months in a couple of demonstrations put on by Vietnam Veterans Against the War. These were down at the recruiting station which, at that time, was in the old Post Office at Veteran's Square. . . . I got pushed around by the police some and [got] arrested once and had to go to court and plead no contest. . . . But then I just found my heart wasn't in it. It wasn't something that I could get involved in at a personal level like I had in civil rights. I think a lot of that was just being burned out by the experience of being there myself. Then, the experience of coming home and having this girl through this chain-linked fence. . .

spitting in my face about something that I had done *exactly the opposite of* two days ago; It's like something just snapped or something. [I] just didn't want to be a part of it.

. . . I guess the main thing that's happened between then and now is the Country [US] has realized that it really didn't do anything in the way of supporting individual veterans when they got back. I don't think at that time they even thought much about the kind of problems we might have. I don't even think *we* [the veterans] had thought very much about the kind of problems we might have. I think there's been a lot more recognition of that [more recently], but. . . it's just amazing what it took before it even got to that point.

A couple of years ago I read a statistic in the newspaper that more Vietnam veterans had killed themselves, had committed suicide, *since* the war ended than had died in the war itself. It was just staggering! Did it take fifty-five thousand of us to kill ourselves before the Country would realize, "Oh gee, maybe these guys have a problem!" I think very belatedly the Country has begun to realize that it wasn't like World War II. People got sent over there and *then* they got "fucked-up" by it. "Then" because they just kind of dribbled back by little dribs and drabs, as opposed to everybody coming back to parades all at once, sort of thing. There wasn't any kind of support network setup with that [type of piecemeal return]. In World War II, there was a war. Then it ended. Then there was peace and there were services.

This [the Vietnam war] is something that just went on for 11 years. The ones who came back were "fucked-up." Meanwhile we're still sending more over there. . . . There wasn't that transition from. . . war to peace that would kind of lead things to create support groups. . . because the thing was still going on. So I guess it was a surprise to me that it took another 10 years after everybody had gotten back for them to get around and realize that, "Gee, I wish I had paid attention to some of this stuff." But I'm glad to see they did, finally.

. . . He [my father] would tell stories--I guess he's a story teller too--like when he was in the Battle of the Bulge. He'd tell stories about things that happened to him over there [in W.W.II] and I kind of drew out of that what I thought he was talking about. But we never talked directly in terms of his emotions or things like that. It was really only after I got back and had started writing stories about it myself--probably about five years ago--that I asked him more about that stuff.

I asked him how he felt and how he had felt before he went. I asked about what he was going to and how he dealt with it when he came back, and that sort of thing. And that was good because in many ways he had dealt with it very much the same way I had dealt with it. . . . [He] got a house and did very much the same thing that I did when I got back, as far as being a solid citizen. . . . He never even said anything later on about having any problems with it or anything like that, which was different from my experience.

I tried to be the solid citizen for about seven years then [I] realized that whether it was because of Vietnam, or whether it was because of just who I was, or a combination of the two, I at best could be maybe semi-liquid. I [am] lucky that I wasn't just totally gaseous. I wasn't just a solid citizen. I wasn't going to be somebody who would just do that. I guess that's when I started thinking [about Vietnam]. That was probably nine years before I started writing stories about it; it started coming [up] through my consciousness.

So, in a lot of ways, his experience paralleled mine with the [one] exception: that it became something that troubled me more ten to twelve years *after* I got back. That didn't seem to happen to him. Other than talk [about it] with him . . . I didn't really talk about it with anybody. . . . I had, in a way, while I was there, [by letters] told her [my wife] the stories that I was interested in telling her. I didn't really see much reason, either for me or for her, to tell her about the horrific kind of things. So I never really talked with her about it either.

. . . Five years [ago] or so, when we [my father and I] did have a conversation, I asked him about how he had felt before he was going, knowing what he was going to be

getting into. . . . [I also asked him] how he dealt with it when he came back. That [conversation] was helpful in part, because the way he did deal with it was very much like the way I dealt with it. So right or wrong, I felt it kind of validated what I had done.

I started telling him at that point that I started writing stories about it. I had sent them to him. He had read them. He basically asked me, "Did something happen that made you start writing these stories?". . . Well, I started writing five years ago, about seventeen years after I got back. And I said, "I just found that I kind of pushed all the stuff down and that it was bubbling up. I knew that I had to pop the cork somehow. This was my way of popping it." He found it very interesting. He hadn't ever felt a need to do that in anyway (writing things down or talking [about it]). He didn't recall that he had spent much time talking with his buddies--his friends state-side--about his experience in the war. But he also said he didn't really feel he needed to because working in a VA Hospital meant that a lot of these guys that were working there were people who had been in the war or had just recently gotten out.

So there was just kind of shared tacit understanding of each other that I guess I didn't experience as much of. So they didn't really need to talk about it because they all knew kind of what they had all been through. Where as here, there were very few people. I suppose in part that's because I wasn't from here originally, before I went to Vietnam. I can only think of one or two people. There weren't people up here, at least that I knew, that I really had much opportunity to share conversation with about that.

. . . If I had started talking to you about my experiences and how I feel about it there, and you hadn't been there, first, I don't think you're really going to understand it, except in some kind of movie scene sort of way. Secondly,. . . I'm going to get pegged as this "crazy Vietnam vet" because there was a lot of that. I mean anytime anybody did something violent [you'd hear], "a former Vietnam veteran." Everybody just gets this picture of some kind of guy with a long-hair crazed look in his eye. I just didn't want to be associated with that. I was too busy trying to be a solid citizen.

. . . As far as close friends, prior to the time I went and after I went into the service, I didn't really see any of my close friends because I was drafted within 45 days after flunking out of college. The only time I came home was for about [a few] days around Christmas and that was mainly spent in the hospital when my mother was dying. . . . So I never really got a chance to hang with people from high school or college that I had known in my former life, so to speak. As to the people I met up here. . . [they] were people I met after I was already out and they. . . hadn't been [there]. So there's a real break in my life in that sense. I didn't have a community of people that I had known pre-Vietnam that I hung with post-Vietnam.

. . . One of the experiences that Vietnam definitely taught me, in a very graphic sense, is that people go away; and they often do so very suddenly. But even if they don't [go away] through some kind of violent activity, death or accident or anything like that, they *do* go away. I mean children leave their parents, parents may separate, families tend to move further apart . . . friends go off in different directions. . . . So when you put those two together, "People go away" and, "You raise your children to leave you," I found that I didn't feel any kind of emotional need to go and be with my father and my brother. [They were] the only living relatives I had left at that point. I didn't really feel much emotional need to go and be with them. I really felt more of an emotional need to try and settle in with in my wife and my in-laws and my community here, where I chose to live. So there was a real. . . social discontinuity, and it was a familial discontinuity too, in that sense. But it wasn't anything then or now that bothered me. I think that's just because of my perspective.

. . . I think John Donne is wrong: every man *is* an island. . . . We're all in our little cages and the closest we ever come to anybody is being able to reach out of the bars to somebody else who is reaching out [of] their bars. So I've always been . . . a loner in that sense. It didn't really bother me, nor does it really bother me now, in that sense. People wonder when they read these stories if I'm reaching out to other people by writing and

publishing these stories. I suppose in some sense I am. I think it's probably much in the same sense that I got . . . involved in civil rights stuff. . . . But I really write them more for me than anything else. I mean it's a way of me helping myself codify my perspective, I suppose. . . . It's now something that's a little bit more concrete, put down on page, as opposed to just being this kind of amorphous massive stuff that floats around in your head.

. . . I think making sense of anything in your life, whether it's Vietnam or anything else, is always an on-going process because we are protean; we change with our experience. Even writing a story and thinking you made sense of it, [this story] will then raise [and provoke] things that don't make sense. . . . So you have to write another story and try and make sense of that. But yes, it certainly helped [to] . . . sharpen my take on it in terms of. . . my perspective on my involvement in {Vietnam].

. . . I guess I'd have to say that, in at least a metaphorical sort of way, writing about it has helped sharpen my perspective on who I am and what my involvement there meant. . . . I think humans are very adaptable, and they can find ways to re-wire the circuit board and function without necessarily having made sense of the experience, particularly of a horrific one. But I think they cheat themselves in the process of doing that. And I ultimately I think it's going to be much more helpful to their self actualization, to borrow a term from Maslow, if they can somehow make sense of their experience.

. . . Most of my stories will grow out of some kind of what I call *snapshot:* my friend sitting down hard in the sand after he's been shot, the little baby coming in with it's foot hanging by a thread, the girl through a chain-linked fence. . . . What I think happens is that I came back with this photo album of snapshots. I think what I did for a long time was just [say], "Okay, let's take this photo album and stick it up on a high shelf somewhere or underneath the bureau," or something like that. But then what happened is . . . that technique doesn't really work because the photos are obviously just inside you.

I found over time that they just [on their own initiative] started a slide show. They just started flashing up a little bit more frequently. But what was happening was that you

get *fixed* on the snapshot . . . and it sort of freezes. It's like a frozen moment in time. So if all you do is keep running the slides through and seeing these frozen moments in time, then it freezes you. And [then], you don't have that ability to work in any protean fashion from this snapshot to that snapshot through some other snapshot.

So I guess for me, writing has been, in some ways, the way of making a moving picture out of a series of snapshots. I mean it's helped me develop that protean ability to cope with change, whether that be change in terms of external circumstances or whether it just be change in my own perspective of things. . . . For me, writing about these things has been a way of making the snapshots turn into something more fluid. It's gotten me off the stop-point of just watching the slides circle through.

. . . There were some issues that had come up. . . . My personality became an issue on the job, I suppose, at least for the President of the University. . . . Getting married to this woman who was a radical feminist [was another issue]. So there was just lots of stuff going on in my life simultaneously. I had started seeing a counselor about once a week who was a Vietnam veteran. He and I really clicked, not just because he was a Vietnam veteran, but he and I just clicked anyway. After we kind of went through all the "mother issues" and "father issues" and things like that, he raised the question about . . . whether I had been a part of any kind of "rap group" . . . and if I felt my experiences in Vietnam might have any effect upon what was going on now. So he kind of batted that back and forth for a few weeks in a pretty general way.

My feeling at that point was that yes, those things, my experiences in Vietnam, probably did have a lot [to do] in the shaping of my perspective in what was happening then. But I felt like I had a lot of the immediate stuff to deal with anyway. That [Vietnam] was something that I didn't feel was having such an impact upon what was going on in my life, at that moment, that I needed to spend a lot of time going through psychoanalysis on it. So that was the only time in any form of the sense that I had really ever spent time talking with a counselor about my Vietnam stuff.

. . . I think it was probably one of the things that got me to thinking. I'm a slow mover . . . I mean . . . this all happened about sixteen years ago and I really just started stories about six years ago. But I think that in that 10 year gestation period there was some [growing conviction], "Okay, this is gonna come up. I can put it off for a while, but this is stuff I'm gonna need to deal with for a while." Then there just became more of an increasing awareness that I needed to do that.

My way of doing that was to write about it, as opposed to going to "rap groups." I did go to one or two "rap groups". . . . Maybe it was just these groups, but I didn't like them because I felt that there was just a lot of guys there who were kind of what I call "professional Vietnam vets". They just wanted to dwell on their experiences *there*. They walked the walk and talked the talk and dressed the part. They still wore fatigues and this kind of stuff. I just wasn't into that.

. . . I do have a few friends but I really am pretty much a loner. I never really had a lot in the way of friends. So there wasn't really a mechanism that I felt comfortable with in terms of talking with friends about these things. Then again, most of these people were not Vietnam veterans . . . so I didn't really have an opportunity to do it [discuss his Vietnam experience] in any less formal way than in something like psychotherapy or a rap group; nor did I really feel the need to. For me, I've always been a very internal, introspective person. My way of working things out is to write about it.

. . . He [the therapist] raised the issue of whether I felt my experiences in Vietnam might have any impact upon what was happening in my life currently. I think it was important that he raised that issue. . . . He wasn't just the kind who would just sit there and nod his head and take notes while I laid on the couch. There was much more reaction. At that particular stage he didn't do a lot in the way of interactive conversation. It was really more just drawing out from me what was my perspective at that point in my experience in Vietnam. And I think that was probably very helpful because it kind of jelled it in terms of bringing it up closer to the surface again. Whereas before, it was something that I just

hadn't really given much conscious thought to. I began to give more conscious thought to it because of it [being brought up in conversation]. So I think that was probably the main thing. I never really got a chance to tell him [about how he was helpful]. I have no clue whether he's ever read any of the things I've written. . . . It would be nice to thank him, in a way. I haven't done that.

. . . Well I moved there as a young man of 22 and returned an old man of 23, I guess. I was a little older than the average age of people. . . . The experience is one that just really makes you age quickly. I mean you have to face issues, that most people don't face, suddenly. And [most people] don't have to try to at least resolve, in some kind of operational sense [the dilemma], "How am I going to continue to get up in the morning and put one foot in front of the other?" I mean that becomes a real issue when you're walking in the mine fields; it's *not* when you're walking on a safe sidewalk.

So yes, you do a lot of--I don't want to call it growing up, but at least in a way [it is]--of resolving, in some kind of practical sense, issues that most people don't have to face suddenly. Most people neither face issues of life and death and the effects on them as individuals nor see the effects upon other individuals on a daily basis. You definitely *do* in that kind of situation. . . . With me, there may not have been anything happening that was really extreme, as much as there was for other guys who were out in the field (although we did have our occasions of extremity) But you just got to see the effects on a daily basis. . . .

. . . I was working in this hospital. I had been in country less than a week. I was working a night shift on the orthopedic ward. There was this, what *had been* a huge black guy on the ward who had stepped on a mine. He had lost both legs and one arm. . . . He was really teetering on the edge, but it looked like he was stabilized in terms of his vital signs and he was going to be OK. He was coming out of all the drugs they had him on, so he was becoming conscious of his situation. He couldn't sleep and he wanted to have

somebody to talk to. So the Sergeant in charge of the ward said . . . "Go sit with this guy."

So I went and sat with this guy. He starts off this whole conversation about his girlfriend and how he was going to be going home, how he was going to be happy to see her, and all this stuff, as he's still coming out of the dope. Then, as he comes out of the dope, he realizes he doesn't have any legs and he has only one arm and. . . lots of shrapnel wounds. . . . As he came to this realization he was saying, "She's not going to want to see me, not in the shape I'm in. What kind of shape am I in for her?" He was crying and everything, and I'm sitting there holding his remaining hand. Then he dies in my arms over a period of about three hours. I mean, he just gave up the will to live because he didn't want to live given the shape he was in. Whereas if he'd had lesser wounds or even terrible wounds but more resolve, if he had a reason to live, he would have. I mean physically, he was going to be "zero." This is like four days in-country [that] I had this experience. Immediately you have to face these issues. . . . So this is one of those experiences [that] definitely made me age quickly.

. . . We were talking about how the guys in the field see this. They see it happen. . . . I mean, there would have been all this horrific blood and bone, everything like that splattered all over their uniforms because of standing near them or whatever. . . . That's a very horrific thing. Then they put them on the chopper and leave, and he leaves. Then they go on about their business. The next three or four days they may not be out in the field, or if they are, they don't have any contact and it's boring.

Meanwhile, I get this guy. I get to watch him die as he comes to the realization of what's happened to him, which is a completely different experience from what theirs [is]. But I don't have to see, or for the most part, didn't have to see the absolute horror of having somebody blown up right in front of you; I got to watch the lingering effects on a daily basis. There were times when people. . . whether these were military or whether these were civilians . . . you get somebody in there who was borderline [and] people

would literally *cheer* when the guy had stabilized to the point where he could then be taken out of the Intensive Care Ward. . . . [Then he could] go off to something where you know, from there on, he's going to be okay, as opposed to going out in a body bag. Because [of] the odds, you can go either way in many cases. In many cases they did not go in favor of recovery. . . . When you see life really hang in the balance like that, and then you see it turn out positively, it makes you feel really good about what you're doing. Whereas when it doesn't [turn out positively], which happens more often than not, it just reinforces, like you said, despair and the stupidity of all this and that sort of thing.

. . . Even though I may feel separate from people, and there's always a kind of psychological distance between me and other people, I just cherish life so much, even when it's bad, just because I can feel the air on my skin and that kind of thing. I know one of the things that's happened as a result of this, [is] that I've become more conscious of this in the last two or three years; I've probably become overly cautious.

. . . I literally, in many cases, will count the steps downstairs in my house, each time I go down the stairs, because I want to know that my foot is on the stair. We have kind of a steep, narrow staircase, anyway, and I tend to stay up in the dark a lot. . . . [I don't want to fall] and hurt myself or kill myself, and bang my head on the newel post or something like that. I know that some of that has become almost kind of a bit of an obsession with me because I value life so much. On the other hand, I smoke a pack of unfiltered camels a day, too. But let me elaborate upon that.

People are always after me to stop smoking. . . . Quite honestly, smoking is a physical pleasure. I mean, there's just nothing like sitting down, especially with a beer or a cup of coffee or something like that, or after a meal and lighting up--going through rituals of lighting a cigarette [and] tapping it. I smoke non-filtered cigarettes, tap it, tap the tobacco down. . . and drawing the smoke in your lungs and letting it out . . . I think, I know I'm not going to live forever, and I'll probably shorten my life by doing this. But

goddamn it, I'm going to enjoy every fucking minute of it while I'm doing it in a very physical way, just because I can. I mean, I'm here to do it so [why not].

. . . I guess one of my mottoes--I finally learned this--is Socrates, "All things in moderation." So I take care not to go overboard on these things at this point in my life. . . . To go overboard kind of destroys the pleasure of the physical experience. I mean, when you're really zonked you don't really enjoy it that much. I do some things like that just to kind of heighten the awareness, I suppose.

. . . I remember it was one day that my daughter and I were sitting down in the front bench in the front yard. . . . She wants help with long-division, so she brought her paper and pencil out. I'm sitting there explaining to her how to do long-division, and I'm saying once you get past the decimal point, and I'm thinking to myself, "Point of no-return. Unless the number is one that is going to end in an even, . . . you can extend it out forever."

. . . That idea that once you get past the decimal point, if it's an irregular number or whatever the phrase is, the fraction can just extend out forever. Somehow that's just like the enjoyment of life. I mean I know it's not going to go on forever, but it just keeps extending while it's going on. I think she and I, in some kind of subconscious way, think alike, because she writes stories, too. I think she tends to think in the same kind of metaphorical way I do. I just remembered when I said that we were looking at the paper and doing this, and we looked up and looked at each other; it was just like this look of recognition, like this means more than something about long-division. It was one of those moments and those things just--God, they're like soap bubbles. They're just so beautiful you'd love to be able to hang onto them, and you know you can't. I feel like I have this appreciation of life in both the physical sense and what I would call a metaphorical sense.

. . . Just keeping on; just being able to continue to enjoy the moment for what it is and to just try to soak as much of that moment up as I can and get as much out of it as I can. . . . I'm not a thrill-seeker or anything like that. I mean, it doesn't have to be anything

that puts me on any kind of edge in terms of heart pounding or anything like that. I don't even do much in the way of exercise or anything like that. It's just watching those soap bubbles.

. . . It's been a long-strange trip. I don't know if I would have gotten to where I am now faster if there had been more sensitivity or maybe even just more knowledge of the kind of thing Vietnam veterans wound up facing when we came back. I mean, I'd like to think that if there had been a responsive therapeutic community, or through the VA, if there had been mechanisms being aware of these kinds [of things] that there would be more support and more ways for people to get from point "A" to point "B". I'd like to think that people would be able to do that faster and smoother.

I hope we've all learned something from the Vietnam veterans' experience. I suspect to some extent we have. When the Gulf War thing happened [and] the people came back, there was a lot more stuff in place quickly to help people deal with things. I know now in the service--I remember seeing something in the paper not long ago [and] this may have been a National Guard Unit or something--they had like a "Family Day". The wives and kids came down to wherever the training is with the guys and they talked about issues that can affect people when you go overseas. I mean, this was even before they had been overseas.

So I guess, I think we've learned. This society has probably learned a lot from them, and that's good. It's just too bad it wasn't there then [when I returned] . . . because it would have been nice to kind of get to this point of relative peace and understanding of the processes [sooner]. [I would have benefited from knowing earlier] . . . how what you went through isn't just something you can put behind you and be a solid citizen without dealing with it somehow. It would have been nice to get to that point a little sooner than 20 some years later. And I think, if I had been able to do that, of how far along I might be by now, if I had been able to do this sort of thing 10 or 15 years earlier or something like that.

And maybe that's just me. I mean, I really wasn't seeking out anything either, so [who knows].

. . . I've kept a journal ever since I was in college. [I wrote] pretty regularly, probably . . . three or four times a week, at least. Some of that tends to be events that happened during the day, and some of it is just more philosophical reflection type stuff. When I was in college I wrote short stories and submitted some to magazines. [I] just didn't do that [write stories for publication] after I got out of service for a long time.

[I] only started doing it again, in terms of writing stories for submission, about six years ago. In the meantime, I didn't really spend any time writing in my journal about the Vietnam experience or anything like that. It became one of those things I could tell was bubbling up and I needed to deal with it more overtly. So it started off with me writing in the journals and that turned into . . . stories and sending them out [for possible publication]. Why was I sending them out? Well, I suppose for everybody who writes there is some glimmer that you'd like to have somebody else see what you did and get some recognition for it. . . . I also just kind of felt like there was material there that could be of interest to people. It was just amazing to me how long the whole Vietnam experience . . . affected America's perception of itself.

. . . If you're just doing a journal, and it's only for yourself, there's going to be cues in what you put on the page that'll trigger a whole bunch of other things in your head. You don't necessarily need to write everything down; but if you're going to send it out to submission to be read cold by somebody, you'd better turn in what is acceptable to be read cold by the reader. You need to make sure it's crafted a little bit more thoroughly so that what you're trying to get across is understood. I found that I wanted to do that even if things didn't get accepted, simply because the process of doing that would in turn solidify more for me. I've always written, but it's been largely journal writing. It's only been in the last six years or so that I've really seriously been sending stories out. Most. . . [stories], when I started, were stories about Vietnam.

All of my writing springs from something that reinforced or said [the following:] "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" I think that "see" is the key word in that sentence. There's something about putting things down on paper then reading it afterwards, that's just *different* from thinking about it or even talking about it with somebody else. [This is] because it makes it stick more in some ways. It's not like it's cast in stone; it's just somehow more objectified in the process of doing it. It somehow becomes more solid in some ways.

So the process of writing has always been one for helping me. It provides a way for me to get my perspective outside of myself so that I can then look at it from a different perspective almost. I certainly think that writing stories has helped me understand my perspective on the war, the Vietnam experience, better in the sense that when you write the story it kind of concretizes what's otherwise a picture that's becoming a little faded, fuzzy, and yellow in your scrapbook in your mind.

So it's like re-touching. It kind of freshens it up again, and in so doing, it's almost as if it makes it more real. I mean it was real once; then memory intervenes and things tend to start getting a little frayed around the edges and yellow. . . . [When] you write the story it's almost like you give it an acid bath and clean it up. It probably also changes it in the process.

I was in a writing workshop with Jack O'Connell . . . and he said that fiction is "imagination running roughshod over memory." I thought that was pretty interesting because I think that your memory tends to manipulate the facts of your previous existence so that what you remember may be real, but may not be true in the sense that it's not necessarily, "Just the facts, man." [It is like] there was this, . . . then there was this, . . . then there was this; . . . but it's another layer [or *different* layers] that goes over it [other layers] that makes those facts *real* for you. It's not so much that you're lying or changing the facts or anything like that, it's just a different slant or a different perspective on the facts.

So writing a story has really helped me, I think, gain perspective on my perspectives. It certainly helps in terms of understanding my perspective on the Vietnam experience. As far as my perspective on myself, that's probably why I write. I mean it's one of the reasons, one of the things that helps me get my perspective on myself; and that's always changing for me.

Every time I sit down and write, it'll be a little different from what it was before, even when it's the same story. I've written this one story, in particular, about eight different times. I wrote it once as a story, once as a very short story, once as a very long story, once as a screen play, and once as a non-fiction piece. There's probably a couple other variations thrown in. And each time, even though it's about the same events (in terms of the true-ness of it), the reality of it is a little different.

. . . I find that my understanding of myself is continually re-evolving, not just from the facts, but from my successive perspectives on the facts. It's like Escher prints, the staircase thing. You go up the stairs and you go make a right-hand, you go up the stairs make a right-hand, you go up the stairs you make a right-hand, you go up the stairs and you're back to where you're started from. Well how do you do that? He's combining two different perspectives within the same picture and that's kind of what I find writing does for me; I wind up having the multiplicity of perspectives on my own experience.

. . . I really find that a lot of my life is done with smoke and mirrors in the sense that I constantly feel as if I'm a fly on the wall watching myself live. There's kind of two *"me's"* at the same time. One is the me that's involved in the experience, and the other is the me that's on the wall watching me being involved in the experience. So I just don't seem to be able to see life without being able to see it from more than one perspective at the same time. . . .Ever since, at least high school, it's just the way I am I guess.

I think that got sharpened a lot after coming home from Vietnam; particularly in the last five or six years [while] writing the stories about it. Why was it sharpened by Vietnam? It's just in part because I was that way anyway. I'd find myself standing around

or doing something in Vietnam, and there would be another little part of me that would be the fly on the wall saying, "Can you believe this shit?" I mean this is so surreal in some ways [that] the only way to maintain your sanity was to gain some other perspective [on it] at the same time it was happening. So I found myself doing that more, while I was there, than I ever had before. It's just kind of continued since then. . . . It seems to have just kind of happened that way, that there is some balance. Sometimes it becomes very skewed one way, and sometimes it becomes very skewed the other.

Obviously there are lots of times when I'm involved in some kind of experience and I'm not really as conscious of the fly-on-the-wall part as other times. Other times I'm much more conscious of the fly on the wall than I am of my self participating in the experience.

. . . It's like a pendulum; it will go back and forth, but it never goes so far out of balance that I become all one or all the other. It usually tends to stay in some kind of mid-range point. And I think if you got to the point where you have swung the pendulum so far one way or the other [you would have problems]. On the one hand, if you swung it so far to the point where you just were totally immersed in your experience, you'd never be able to gain your perspective on your experience. On the other hand, if you swung so far the other way, [then] you spend so much time thinking about your past experience that you don't have any present ones. So I can see that you'd go crazy either way. . . . I don't mean crazy in a clinical sense, but, well maybe you could go crazy, I don't know. I think about that sometimes. . . . [How do you know] whether you're crazy or not? I mean, especially . . . if there's always a part of you watching yourself; does that mean you're crazy? How do you know whether you are or not? Do you need a third part of you outside of those two perspectives to tell you whether you are or not? That's why I say a lot of life for me just went to being "smoke and mirrors." How many images do you see in the mirror at any one time?

. . . I don't know any other way to view it in the sense that while I was in Vietnam, I found myself comparing the experiences I had there to experiences I had had state-side. [I noticed] the radical difference between the two. It took, in some cases, the different perspectives just literally to stay sane in the face of what you were doing.

Since then, . . . for me at least, Vietnam seemed to become one of those kind of pivotal experiences in my life. It's very difficult to do anything in the way of critiquing my perspective on life post-Vietnam without thinking about how Vietnam affected that. I don't find myself able to divorce myself from my experience of Vietnam no matter how much I've tried for fifteen or sixteen years to do so.

. . . The question: "Why would you want to deny, forget, subjugate, push down [or] whatever the case might be, such a central experience in your life?" is part of what led me to write stories. It's obviously going to have had some impact in your life. It's got to have done something in terms of changing your perspective on . . . who you are *regardless* of your perspective of yourself. You are best not to just push that off to the side. You need to explore that; otherwise, you'll never understand who you are. And if you don't understand who you are, how can you start figuring out where you're going from here?

. . . I think I've integrated it [Vietnam] pretty well. I think that part of that comes from having faced up to the fact, sixteen years after the fact, that [it was what] I needed to do for my own personal growth: to . . . very consciously. . . write stories. On the other hand, I know that a lot of what I learned . . . from the Vietnam experience still affects my perspective on myself and the world. I'm not sure that I'm always happy about how it affects my perspective. I mean I do find myself in many ways very emotionally detached from everything around me, including myself. It has to do with the "people go away" business.

This [Vietnam] sharpens [the "people go away" belief]. [I can identify this] in wondering sometimes, "How much do I really care about my wife, my kids, coworkers or friends?" I mean, if something happened to any of them, how much grief would I feel?

How much trouble would I have dealing with those kinds of traumas, other than just on a practical level. . . . But see, even that's just, . . . it's kind of indicative of it. It's like, "Well shit happens, life goes on and who gets the kid up in the morning."

. . . Some people would say that it is a really sick perspective to think about the fact that your wife may get smashed in an automobile accident, but it's just one that's been conditioned from having seen so much death, I suppose. So I'm not always really happy with the way I see things, and I still find myself struggling to try to find some ways of almost overcoming such a powerful lesson. Like [I think], "How can I get back in some ways to being the person, at least I think I was, prior to the time I went to Vietnam?" It seems to me when I was in high school and college that I was, in some ways, a more caring individual. It seems since Vietnam, that in some ways, I'm not [as caring]. I have a feeling that has a lot to do with the experiences that I had in Vietnam.

My mechanism for coping with those [Vietnam experiences] was just to almost shut myself down emotionally, in a lot of ways. It's like, "Don't get too close to anybody because they're going to go away." That's a little hard to deal with sometimes. I find myself still struggling with that. At least I understand what I'm struggling with more now. I think to that extent I've integrated the Vietnam experience. That has a lot to do with the writing. . . . I think there's a lot of guys who just don't understand that's part of the problem, in a way.

. . . My oldest daughter who's a junior in college will graduate, and maybe she'll go to graduate school. Certainly she'll probably move away. Maybe she'll get married. Maybe she'll have kids. She probably won't understand me any better than she does now, for at least another five or ten years. Maybe at that point she'll begin to understand who I was during her childhood a little more. Maybe that will lead her to keep concerned about establishing a better relationship with me than the two of us enjoy together right now. My youngest daughter probably wound up being closer to me than my oldest daughter, if for no other reason than that she's had the fly on the wall perspective of seeing what's

happening with her older sister and me. She is not as tolerant of her older sister's point of view, in part because she sees how it affects me.

My wife will keep on keeping on, trying to be the mediator between all of us. I will probably continue to write. I know I'll continue to write. Some of that might be about Vietnam. Most of it, whether it's about Vietnam or not, will probably have to do with just how I see myself functioning in the world, trying to understand that better. [I'll also] see if there is some way I can improve it, where I feel it needs improving. . . . I'll just keep putting one foot in front of the other, breathing in and breathing out.

. . . I have no clue [about the length of my future]. I often think about suicide not in the sense that that's something I'm planning on doing right now, but it's the ultimate control over your own life. I think if I ever reach the point where life just doesn't seem to be worth living to me anymore, which would largely have to do with issues of physical health . . . I'd like to think that I'd have the courage to just blow myself away. I don't want to wind up being a burden to anyone else. I think a lot about death; I know I tend to have a kind of dark side to my psyche. Sometimes it surfaces in things like gallows humor.

Ernie

. . . I'll start with saying that my father left when I was quite young, I think around the age of four. He left due to what I now believe to be my mother's indiscretions with other men. . . . I remember spending some time in the Salvation Army Home, one evening, on the way to her father's house (my grandfather). . . . We stayed [at my grandfather's house] for many years while I was growing up. I was growing up in the 50's, [and] the 50s were traumatic without a father. We didn't have any money. Because I didn't have a father, I was treated much differently than the other kids. We didn't have any things [such as] toys; stuff that the other children seemed to have. . . .

My great grandfather lived in a house [with] my grandfather, my grandfather's girlfriend Ruth, my mother, my younger brother Ed and my sister Maggie. The reason for

my father leaving, I believe, was [due to the birth of] my youngest brother at the time--Louie. Louie was born shortly after my father left. We spent most[of the time], until about the age of 12, at my grandfather's house, and I don't recall a lot of what happened there. I just remember that it wasn't that much fun as a child growing up. I remember getting beat for throwing a thing or two at my siblings when I was supposed to try and keep them in line and I didn't want to. I would get a beating for it. My mother had one picture that she would bring out [from a] time she beat me pretty badly. She had taken a picture of me just crying in the bathroom. She would take it out and torment me with it every now and then.

. . . She was on welfare, or we received welfare benefits at the time, and [what] the welfare benefits consisted of was going to the county seat which was in Syracuse. We would get the food from the welfare at the time, and it would be government surplus food [such as] cheese, butter, dried milk, beans and things like this. It was given by the government at the time. I guess my mother was very discontent with the situation. I don't remember much about her in my grandfather's house. I don't know, maybe she was gone a lot or something. . . . She made the decision that she didn't want to live like that, with my grandfather, any longer so she moved out and moved into the town of Syracuse. [She] moved into an apartment, and then I saw less of her. She would come with some male companions.

This one time when she was gone, I was supposed to be responsible for the kids. We didn't have any food in the house and I had gone out to one of the gardens in the neighborhood. I would take some lettuce and some stuff that I could get, and I brought it back and put it in the refrigerator. Anyway, I guess the neighbors had had enough of that, and they called the Welfare Department. The Welfare Department came in and decided to take us and put us in a foster homes. I remember the place we were in when the welfare worker came in the house and said, "You've got nothing here." I said, "Yes I do, I've got lettuce in the refrigerator." So they took the four of us kids and put us in a foster home in

another town in New York. . . . It was a farm. . . . It was tough trying to adjust, at the age of 12, to the rejection.

There were some pleasant times or what I thought were pleasant times there. There was a horse barn there that would allow me to ride a horse, and all I had to do was clean the stables and do things like that. But I still would have to do the farm work[at the foster home]. In the morning I had to milk the cow, clean, and then the bad time was over by riding the horse. This one night, I walked into the garage. In the garage were my foster father, my sister and my brother. I wasn't exactly sure what they were doing, but I knew what they were doing wasn't right. Who could I report that to? Who could I talk to? Who could I say anything to? There was no one who would believe me. Finally, I did tell the Social Worker, and when I did I received the wrath of a foster parent; I was rejected by him. They said, "No way, he doesn't know what he's talking about, he's crazy." I went in to have some counseling.

All of us were removed from that foster home. We were all put into another foster home, [but] we were separated--not all of us were put in [one] foster home. They also said to my youngest brother, Louie, [that he] was crazy, and they had him put in a State home where he stayed until he was almost 21. I guess I came that close to also being committed.

My mother met another man and got married. The guy's name was Hank McDonald . . . who owned a farm. She convinced the Welfare Department that I was needed on the farm to help, so she got me out of being in the foster home. Hank had three boys and a daughter that I assumed the responsibility for. Shortly after going there, my mother had another baby, a son. He was Hank Junior, and [this meant] more responsibilities for me. At about the age of, the baby's age, about 18 months, my mother ran away with a bartender.

My stepfather was an alcoholic, a drunk. He was gone, and there I was at the age of 14 with all the responsibilities. I had three boys and the baby [in addition to] going to school and working on the farm.

We had good neighbors. I took the baby down to the neighbors, [who lived] down the road, each morning. [Then] I got everybody ready for school and had to do all that, plus go myself. I knew how important it was to go through school. I had been told at a very early age that school was important, so I made sure I made it to school. I made sure I did everything that I could. But the final outcome was that Hank Junior was adopted by another family, and the Welfare Department came in. It was just too much, and I wound up at my grandfather's again.

. . . My great grandfather had died, so it was just the three of us. My grandfather had his work. I was going to school and working, and I *just* had to take care of myself. . . . Yes, [it was a big change to *only* take care of myself]. . . . [When] I the responsibility [of caring for my siblings], at least there seemed to be somebody [around] that cared [about me]. I think it [having that responsibility] wasn't that bad.

. . . There was a situation as I was growing up at my grandfather's [that I will describe]. There was a blacksmith's shop on the corner by my house. . . that I would go stand at. [We would] stand there while we were waiting for the bus to go to school. There was a man there who was our friend. He befriended me and he sexually assaulted me when I was about nine years old. It's something that happened; I didn't know that it was wrong. I didn't know; he did. . . . It's one story that stands out. When I had gone in to tell, when I went in to see the analyst and told him what had happened at the foster home. . . I kind of was chastised for having even mentioned anything about this. . . . This man was an uncle to a friend who I had grown up with. [The analyst said], "He was such a nice man, how could he? He couldn't have done anything like that." [I said], "Well, you know it happened." His nephew, my friend, [chastised me]... they had found out about me telling what had happened.

. . . I worked on a farm; I worked for Steve Swan on the farm. He was always good to me, he and his wife and his family. Yes, [This work for Steve Swan was separate from working on my mother's farm]. I wasn't making any money working on *that* farm. I

had to figure out something . I had to work for Steve Swan. Yes, for a short time, [I supported myself and my siblings]. Ed and I worked there for 50 cents an hour. When I went into the service, I had received several pay raises. When I told them that I was going into the service he offered me a pay raise of 75 cents an hour to stay there.

. . . There were a *lot of responsibilities* at a rather early age. . . . I don't remember too many good days, too many good times. . . . As opposed to all the material things that the neighbors had, that friends had, [I had very little]. There's nothing I can do about that, all I can do is go on, try to survive. You can tell people about things like this, but I guess unless they've actually been there, they wouldn't understand. I guess words do not [adequately describe it] . . . unless you were there [it's hard to understand]. If there's nothing that stands out, it is that you do seem to forget it. There was not too much good, so I believe in the philosophy if you don't have something good to say you shouldn't say it. . . . No it's not hard talking about the truth.

. . . When I had the opportunity to take a test for going to the service, I took that opportunity and took the test. They offered us a bus ticket and a room to stay in Syracuse, New York--a bus ticket to the Afes station in Syracuse and even spending money to go take this test to go into the service and see if we had the what was needed. . . . [They wanted to] find out if we had any capabilities that the service could use. So my buddy, Ted Smith and I decided that we would take them up on that because it sounds like a good idea, why not; a free bus ticket and I never did anything like that before

. . . The first time that I saw him [my father] after the age of four, was on my way to Vietnam. The last time I saw him alive was when I came back from Vietnam. Last May [1995] he passed away. . . . I was close to my brother, Ed, and that was about it. There's an association more or less with Hank's children. I have not seen Hank Junior since he went out and was adopted. I did receive a call from Hank Jr. last fall. He said he had got a call that they were going to have a reunion last fall [with Hugh Jr.], and I haven't heard from him since. . . . One of the things I found [out] when I did see my father [is that]

when he left, he really left. He used to live in Seattle, Washington and had had two daughters with another marriage out there that I found out about. He had a little daughter at that time [1971], Julie. She was three, and we kind of lost contact over the years. Three [or] four years ago, my son called out and made contact with my father; and Julie in turn made contact with us. She's now living with my brother, Ed, and they've got a son, Mark.

. . . There were a couple of things [from my childhood that were influential on me]. I think the education [was important], . . . I did finish school. I think *that* drive [was important]! I also think of one time in grade school. I remember the Mayor coming in, and he was a substitute teacher for the class. And I remember looking at him with awe, and I said, "Someday I would like to be Mayor. I would like to do that." I remember looking up to people. Ted Master's brother Edwin, who was drafted and went to Vietnam, got shot. . . . He [Edwin] was looked up to. That was something I thought, that maybe looking at going into the service would be one way of getting out of my situation, to improve it.

. . . My greatest [childhood] challenge was, "Hey, here I am." I don't think anybody cared. I couldn't say one person [was attentive to me]. It was frustrating [to not be understood and heard]. But it [my home town] was a nice place to be away from.

. . . The only one [childhood story] I've really quoted is the one of my mother taking off and leaving me with all the kids. . . . I haven't told that to very many people. No, [I don't talk very much about my childhood]. I think self reliance [was a positive preparation for Vietnam]. But maybe the thing that was the most damning was the want for acceptance, and I would say that was to lead to other problems.

. . . I remember being in high school, the teacher mentioning--just barely touching on Vietnam--that something was going on over there. I didn't even know about it! So it was . . . nothing prepared me for it, nothing. Even when Ted's brother Edwin enlisted and was shot, I didn't even know where it was. I thought I was good in history and geography.

. . . I went into the service in what was at that time called The Army Security Agency. I was a "98-Charlie" which was a radio traffic analyst. I was trained at Fort Devens in MOS, and when I graduated from the school I had orders cut to go to Okinawa. The orders were changed when I went home. I went home on vacation on my way to Okinawa, and the transfer orders had been changed to Germany. I received a certified letter from the United States Army while I was on vacation.

So I went to Germany and was sent to the 507th detachment in Augsburg. I didn't like my tour in Germany at that time; in fact, I hated Germany! I was in what was considered a critical MOS. Had I waited a few more months or a year, I could have re-enlisted for a VRB (Variable Rate Bonus) of $10,000, but I didn't. I disliked Germany so much that I wanted to get out of there.

So I re-enlisted, and the only place that I could re-enlist for was Vietnam. So I said, "Yes, I'll go," and I re-enlisted for Vietnam. I did not get my Variable Re-Enlistment Bonus because I re-enlisted too early. But I was in such a hurry to get out of Germany that I really didn't care; I just wanted to get out of there and go anywhere. I don't know why I didn't like it. Looking back at it, I don't know, I was just very discontented with it.

So, I got a leave and got back to the states in preparation to go to Vietnam. I went home to Syracuse, New York. I ran into an old girlfriend of mine, and we decided to get married. She was my first wife. The marriage actually lasted 11 days. . . . The 11 days that we were married, while I was on leave, I guess is how long the marriage actually lasted. What I found out was that her intentions were that since I was going to Vietnam, I probably would get killed there, [and] she'd just collect the insurance. Her family told me [this] later.

. . . Anyway, two or three days prior to my reporting to Washington for transfer to Vietnam, I decided to stop off in Seattle, Washington, because that was where my father was living. So I stopped there and met my father for the first time since I was four. And I

got to meet his new family at that time. . . . I got to spend a couple of days there, and then my father took me up to Fort Lewis, Washington, and I deployed to Vietnam.

. . . I flew into . . . Cameron Bay, but I was assigned to the 509th MAC-V which was in Saigon.

. . . Anyway, I ran into my cousin over there, and it was the first time I had seen him, I guess since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. But I got my first night in Saigon. I got taken out on the town by my cousin, and I don't remember very much that evening.

. . . Finally, I went to the unit for assignment. They were looking for people that had worked in their MOS, . . . my MOS, for about a year. They were looking to train ARVN counterparts in our tactics. I said, "Well, I graduated X number of months ago, and I just came from Germany." They looked at me and they said, "You must have experience, so we're going to assign you to a DARS Team." (Division Advisory Radio Research Support) They assigned me to the Eighth ARVN Division, the Twenty-third DARS, which was a 11-man team that worked with the 8th ARVN Division in Banmethuot, up in the central highlands on the B3 front.

. . . I was supposed to start training working with intelligence people in my MOS. All of us, whether you were a "lingy," (linguist) . . . [or] whether you were an O5H . . . we were supposed to work with the ARVNS to teach them our ways of doing military intelligence. . . . I had a top-secret crypto clearance, and there's much of what I did that I can't tell you. Most of the ARVN troops that we worked with were both Sergeant rank or higher.

. . . In Banmethuot, as for actual combat action, we were shelled; [there were] mortar shells and sniper attacks every now and then, but it wasn't as severe as many of the other areas that were North or even South of there. It was fairly secure. Because of our MOS, we did have prices on our heads. They were very careful, and as long as we did our job, which was basically working during the day, we didn't have to do guard duty. The MAC-V Teams that were there-- . . . Team 33, was there--[and] they worked out of

that base. The CIA, Air America, was in an Air force base up there. As long as we did our job. . . we weren't bothered. We had our own vehicles that we had to maintain.

Because of the lack of intelligence that was received, the lack of working intelligence that we had up there, they found other jobs for us to do. One of my additional duties was to, because I had some training with auto mechanics, maintain the generators which were imperative . . . for our communications with rear echelon units.

While I was up there, I was introduced to drugs, and it was every where. The Sergeant in charge of our unit and the Sergeant that was with our unit were never without a joint. It didn't take long before I became involved. They brought an inspector up there into our unit, and they busted just about everyone in our unit, everyone except the Captain and the Sergeant who was in charge. . . . They took us out of that unit down to the train, the 330th radio research. Now here I was, a radio traffic analyst, a super-spook without a clearance.

. . . They gave us all choices in MOS's. . . . I don't know what happened to them [the others in my unit]. They became 11-Bs, they became foot soldiers, and were redeployed in the Republic of Vietnam somewhere. I stayed the rest of the tour right there and got the tour cut short. I only spent, I think, 10 months in Vietnam as opposed to a full year.

When I got down to Nhatrang, they were running us through the busting procedures. They'd run us day and night, wouldn't let us sleep, till we signed those papers that they wanted us to sign to change our MOS's to say that we did these drugs. But there in the 330th in Nhatrang, it was even worse. I mean everybody was doing drugs there. They were doing even worse drugs; they were doing heroin. I mean they'd get up in the morning and do it all day, all night; they'd pass out and do it again.

. . . When I was still up at Banmethuot, after my first six months, I was entitled to seven days R&R. With seven days leave and the seven days R&R, going to Hawaii seemed like a good option. I had saved some money. I was sending all my money home

except for a few dollars, but I was able to put together enough to buy plane tickets for my wife and some other money for the vacation, for her to meet me in Hawaii. We had hotel arrangements on a military base, and it should have been a wonderful arrangement. I got into Honolulu, and I went over to the airport to wait for her to get there. She didn't show up. I went to the counter, and I checked [on her]. They said, "No, she didn't come in on that flight." I called home and talked with her mother. Her mother said that she's not coming [and that] she sold her tickets. Well, I bought plane tickets then from Hawaii to Syracuse, New York.

On the way, there was a layover somewhere. I called my friend, Marvin Todd. Marvin says, "Oh yes, she's seeing this guy by the name of Harry." So I was getting drunk and flying home. I got into Syracuse and took a taxi home. I went up and looked in the door; this guy was laying there in his briefs. The door was locked, so I kicked it open and walked in, grabbed him by the skin of his chest, held him up and asked him, "What's your name?" He said, "Harry." I smashed him; I dropped him and reached in my pocket for my knife. I was going to skin him. Fear is a hell of a motivator--I couldn't catch him. Her mother said, "I'm going to call the police." I said, "You'd better do it in a hurry." The police got there. It was the father of the guy that I went to school with.

. . . Harvey not only left the building, [he left] the town, the county, I don't know. I don't know if he's stopped running yet. He was pretty distraught, but I was fresh out of the field. . . . I just wanted to hurt and leave and strike out, that's how hurt I was. . . . I didn't think of the consequences, I didn't care. It was one of those cases of, "What, what'll I do now?" Obviously there was a woman that I thought I loved, and she was more interested in someone else. . . . It's been a case of trying to seek love.

. . . When the police officer picked me up and took me to the station, he knew what my situation was. He looked at what had happened. I was in uniform. There were no charges that were pressed.

I went back to Nam. That's when I guess I really started beginning to look forward to getting "fucked-up!" I didn't care, [I] just wanted to get "fucked-up". . . . All that mattered was getting "fucked-up." It didn't matter; nothing else mattered. . . . It didn't matter, let's just get "fucked-up." When I came back and found [my wife this way, it pushed me to the point of not caring anymore]. I thought that I was finally getting a handle on my life, that I had somebody that cared about me. When I found out that wasn't the case, I reverted to the fight. I reverted to what made me feel more of a man, more of whatever. I could take my aggressions, take my anger out.

. . . I had the thought that [she and] I had been part of a team while I was up in Banmethuot. I felt good about that team; I felt good about what I was doing. . . . After that incident, when I got back, that's when things really started to deteriorate, when the other stuff seemed to happen.

. . . As for the people of Vietnam, I thought very highly of them. I lived among them; I lived basically with them. I knew them. They would take us places with them. If they had feasts, or got in a new banquet of dogs or monkeys or whatever it was, they would invite us to the banquet. It was interesting.

. . . The city of Banmethuot was a beautiful city, or it had been. The French had taken it over. I have many good thoughts of there. There were still French that lived within the coffee plantations, who had plantations there. The best coffee I ever had was up there.

. . . It was interesting seeing the people and how they reacted to life. They had a shopping, what we would refer to as a shopping center. It had been there for a thousand years probably. People came to this one particular point. That's where they would sell their goods and bring them in these baskets. . . . [An] interesting aspect is that the Vietnamese government decided that they knew better, [so] they would build away from this area. They put in one large cement floor and a covering over it, so they could have an enclosed area to sell their goods [in]. But nobody would go there. They were so used to

selling in this one spot... and this is where they had always sold; this is where their grandfather and their grandfather's grandfather had been selling. . . . They didn't want to go over to that new spot. . . . The mud was just right for them.

. . . That was the people; they had an attitude that if they didn't get it done today, so what? The sun is going to come up tomorrow. If I don't get it done today, I'll do it tomorrow. If I don't get it done tomorrow, well, I'll get it done the next day. I don't think it was procrastination; I think they weren't hurried. Our attitude was we wanted to push, push, push, push. We wanted it right then. Their attitude was, "*Why?*" I look back at that and pull from that. It's one of those things that I learned from them that I've been able to use.

I like the Vietnamese people. I respected them, and I feared them. If I had the chance to go back, I would. I would like to go see there in peace. I know that was a beautiful area with those plantations; it was nice. I mean, the animals, the wild animals, tigers, elephants, it was all there.

. . . When I finished up my tour over there, I was in Nhatrang which is just inland from Cameron Bay. . . . [They busted our unit in Banmethuot so severely] because we were highly classified. We all had top secret crypto clearances. We had unique intelligence. . . . Our morale up at Banmethuot was very high. When we went to Nhatrang... I didn't meet anyone that had high morale. It was like night and day. We were a tight cohesive unit in Banmethuot. In Nhatrang, nobody cared about anything.

. . . I really liked the people, the Vietnamese people, like the ones I worked with. . . . They felt as strongly about freedom as we did, it seemed. Their fear of communism was real. But aside from those people, the other people that lived out in the plantations just wanted to live their life. They wanted to do what they wanted to do. They weren't interested in whether they had a communist government or if the United States owned them. They just wanted to live, and they could have cared less who was there. As long as they weren't getting shot at, they didn't care.

There was a completely different feeling from the central highlands down to Nhatrang. Nhatrang was a whole different thing. We really didn't have that much contact with the Vietnamese there. The one's that we saw were Americanized, or they were trying to take you for everything that they could. That was a difference there.

. . . One thing that that stuck with me for years was, in my sleep, I don't know, a paranoia-type sleep--a light sleep; no one could get near. No one could get near or anywhere around me [or] I would know it. I would be awake. If for some reason the person was able to get close, . . . my wife could get close, . . . if she touched me, then it was like I would jump up and do something. I would react in a way. . . . I mean I'd get up swinging or try to slap her. Sometimes loud noises, somebody popping a firecracker or stepping on a milk carton... the noises you can make... a sound like a gun going off unexpectedly, I can find myself ducking, dropping. . . It's an automatic thing. Even to today that's still a reaction.

It just happened a few days ago. Some kids had some kind of a starter pistol. . . . I was delivering [as a mailman] to this house. I was making a delivery in a box, and I looked over and glanced at this door. There was a window, and there was a gun pointing out at me; and I dropped, out of reaction. I looked in, and there was this six year old kid with a toy gun.

. . . I was on the plane when I was going home. . . . We had turbulence, and the plane was bouncing and making the loud noises. I found myself ducking under the seat and reaching up above the seat for my helmet Those are some of the things that stand out in my mind. I don't think that they're all bad, but they are reactions. The thing that stands out in my mind with the loud noises is that it does put me, without question, in another place; it really does. It's all reaction. It's like with a noise, I just react, [and] there's no thought to it.

. . . I can't think of anyone that I really sat down and told it [my Vietnam experience] to, other than right here with you. [It's been] almost 24 years [since Vietnam].

I don't talk about my childhood to too many people either. Maybe it was a decision [the fact that I don't talk about my childhood or Vietnam]; it just, it could be a decision to not have it come up. . . as much as anything else, to avoid it, to avoid speaking of it. Whenever I've spoken with other vets, it's been their way of avoiding it as well. They've avoided it.

I've read in the Bible that it's good to confess in front of God and another human being. Actually it comes from the Twelve Steps. I guess probably, I was thinking to use this as a Fifth Step, and it seemed like a good idea to me. Even though I haven't written this down, I know that it will be. That will take care of my Forth Step.

. . . I went over to Vietnam, a young naive kid. I left there older and wiser but still naive in many ways. I think that it grew me up in many ways, in some ways. But I still remained naive in many of the world's ways. So, I think it was like a right of passing.

When I look at it, I wonder what I actually did learn. I always use it as a stepping stone. I use, "Yes, I served in Vietnam; I did this, I did that. I was there. I saw this; I saw that." I never expound on the bad experiences. I don't really talk about it. I don't know what being there has done to me, in all honesty.

. . . One of the biggest problems, or one of the things that I see as a problem from it, was that it was a waste of a lot of things. I saw waste: everything from human beings to equipment. I saw waste of, looking back at it, of a nation and attitudes of a nation. Coming back into the states, coming back to the world, being spit on by people and called "baby killer," being afraid to be seen on the streets in uniform because of abuse that we received at the time, that had never, never happened before to people returning from a war.

I think one of the most profound things that happened to me happened in 1992. It was Veteran's Day in '92. I was sitting in my chair; I had my drink beside me, and I was getting drunk. I was looking at the TV thinking, "What in hell had happened to this country?" There was a president elect. . . that every time I looked at him, I saw those people spitting on me and calling me a "baby killer." I made a decision, at that time, that I

would do something about my situation. I could continue to moan and groan, and complain and bitch like everyone else, or I could become involved and make changes. I decided at that time, that I would make those changes--that I would attempt to try and make those changes. That's when I made the decision to become involved in politics. And I think that was definitely the influence of Vietnam--of what happened to me when I came back from there.

. . . When I returned from Vietnam I didn't return into civilian life, I was still in the service. I was under a commitment for several more years in the Army. When I returned to the states I went into a combat engineer outfit. It was Light Equipment Company at Fort Devens; it was the 18th Engineer's Six forty-second Light Equipment Company at Fort Devens. I really tried to stay away from the civilian side of it.

I had received an annulment from my first marriage during that particular time. I was deeply immersed in drinking. Drugs were still very prevalent at that time throughout the Army base and [with] the people around me. That's where I was. It's a blur; that particular time period for me, '72 through '74, . . . when I was in that Light Equipment Company.

That's where I met my second wife. She was going to a nearby college. . . . It was an all-girls' college. . . . At the time, the Army was . . . men . . . and it wasn't women. So, the obvious thing to do was to go to a women's college if you wanted to find a girl. So that's how we met [during] the 18 months that I spent at Fort Devens.

. . . They had changed my MOS to 63-B which was a vehicle mechanic. Being at the Combat Engineers or in the Light Equipment Company [meant] we had a lot of heavy equipment: bulldozers, cranes, earth-movers, things like that. . . . We were still working around explosives, . . . basic combat engineer type stuff [like] building bridges.

. . . I more-or-less stayed within the Army post or very close around it, so I didn't become involved with having to become a civilian. . . . I just had more in common with the people in [the military]. I was immersed with then, trying to make up for the problems

that I had had in Vietnam, with my new MOS. I started working more intently on becoming promoted. . . . I think there was an embarrassment there. I had taken great pride in the fact that here I had a top secret crypto clearance, and I had an MOS that was [critical]--I was a super-spook. Now I was relegated to the position of vehicle mechanic. So I immersed myself with trying to work myself back up within the Army to try to prove myself as being capable of obtaining some sort of goodness. So that's where I was and... that's why I stayed where I was because that was the way to be promoted.

. . . I looked around me, and I saw other people of the same age group that were non-commissioned officers--E-5's and E-6's--upon returning from Vietnam and with the same time in service [as me]; and I was a PFC, so that was kind of an embarrassment to me. I did make it up, and within a short time, I was promoted. I achieved, within five years of time and service, the rank of E-6. So I did work hard at that. That's where my interest was.

. . . I spent 11 years in the service. I was stationed at Fort Devens for [five years of] that time period, and then I was sent back to Germany . . . the place I wanted to get away from. But now I was remarried, [and] we had a family. I had a wife and two children, and we were heading back to Germany. I was going to a place called Eschborn, which is just outside of Frankfort, with the 317th Combat Engineers. Their major function was building bridges.

. . . They looked at me, and they looked at my GT scores on my tests that I had taken prior to coming into the service and they said, "Well you've got these high scores we ought to put you in the Atomic Demolition's Platoon." But I wasn't interested, and when they saw there was a problem with security clearance, that really shot it down.

There I was in Germany and intent on being promoted. . . . There I had a desk job at what was the R.G. Farmment Building. I was there in 1975 when they blew it up. I was up on the second floor, [and] the bomb went off on the first floor. Here I was thinking that the buildings were being blown up around me . . . in a supposedly secure

area. . . . It was a bit of an experience. Just about the time we cleared out. . . we were dragging people out of that building. They blew up the officers' club which was a couple hundred meters away. . . . They were a neo-socialist group in Germany, a fascist group. They were intent on getting the United States out of Europe.

. . . During this time in Germany it was better. It was nicer having a family over there--having someone there that I felt cared. We traveled throughout Europe, but there again, it was the people. There was resentment of the people towards the military because we were foreigners there. So there was a resentment there. . . . It seemed, as the Mark declined in price, so did their respect or their want to have the US Military over there. So it was kind of a slap in the face to any of the military people who were over there. We were there to keep the peace against the communist threat which was the Warsaw Pact.

. . . A major portion of the non-commissioned officer ranks and most of the officers that had obtained field grade were Vietnam veterans and were understanding of people who had served there. . . . I would not speak of it [Vietnam], not out of choice; it was just a matter of it not coming up as a topic. . . . I think it would have made things worse because . . . I would have felt forced to make myself out to be a front-line-grunt type, as opposed to what I actually was involved with in Vietnam. If there were any conversations [about Vietnam, there was pressure to act as if you were one of] the ones that were in the field, the metal winners. . . . The classification would be: either you were a fighter in the field or you were a "REMF," . . . a "rear echelon mother fucker;" it was a term that was used.

. . . There were two sides. . . either you were in the field fighting or you were in Saigon at a desk job. . . . No, [I don't think that categorization is fair]. . . . Every position was important. It was much like I grew up, having a want to feel important, to be seen, [and] to be known. There, I would guess that the REMFs were looked at as being of a lesser importance. But everyone was important; otherwise, why would you have been there, or be anywhere?

. . . There was a lot of bull shitting that went on, and people wanted to put themselves across as either they were a front line troop or they weren't. If they were a desk jockey, they tried to put themselves across as [someone else], and it could be very easily seen. It was much easier not to talk about it than it was to discuss it. I believe maybe that that was part of why it wasn't discussed.

. . . I got out of the service in 1980.

. . . When I finished my tour in Germany I came back to the states, and I ran into a person that befriended me. He was an SFC (Sergeant First Class). I was an E-6. I was a Motor Sergeant, and he was the Platoon Sergeant for our Company. I got transferred back to the states to Fort Devens, and I was at a transportation outfit there. This guy and I spent a lot of time together at work and away from work.

I was in line to be promoted to E-7 and was feeling pretty good about that. . . . Anyway, he got remarried, and I was settling in. . . . It was right around Christmas time and we had . . . a Christmas work schedule where we worked a day on and had a day off, and we would cover for each other. . . . The First Sergeant would condone the actions of us as long as someone was there to cover that time period--as long as we were at 50% strength rather than doing the day on-day off [routine]. If you wanted to take off for a week or so, as long as it was covered, we did that. He [my friend] took off for his two weeks during the Christmas holidays and I covered for him. I worked every day.

I got a call from my . . . mother-in-law saying they were going down to Florida, and [she asked if] I would like to go next week. I said, "Well, it shouldn't be a problem. I'll get permission." . . . I figured that the last couple of weeks I covered for this other guy, and maybe now he could cover for me. So I called him up, and he said, "Sure, not a problem; go ahead." I went, [and when] I came back, I was brought up on charges of being AWOL.

Here I was an E-6 getting ready to go on a seven-list, and being brought up on charges for being AWOL! I got busted by the battalion commander because he didn't cover

for me. . . . He didn't do what he should have; he just didn't show up. He was supposed to be covering for me; he just didn't show up. I paid the price; I got busted.

So it removed me from the promotion list. . . . And there was a policy that [states]: "it's up or out." If you don't make such and such a promotion after X number of years, then you're forced out of the military. . . . Here I was around 10 or 11 years in the military, and [there was] no chance of promotion now. . . . Once you've been put in that situation, there's no chance of promotion. When that commissioned officer gets busted, that's a kiss of death. I was devastated that that would happen because here was my military career that had just been blown out of the water.

So that's when I got out of the service in 1981. That's why I got out. I couldn't re-enlist, and I couldn't be promoted, so I had to get out of the service. . . . Here is a guy that got kicked out of the Army. People will take a look at that. I got out with an honorable discharge. There were no attachments or anything to it, but it was still a stigmatism that would be attached to it; at least in my eyes [it would be] a stigmatism of "there's a person that couldn't even make it in the Army."

. . . I thought I was finally making it, to the point that I was feeling confident, and that I was actually somebody. [I had] to be put down one more time. [It] should have been . . . a tap on the shoulder, and it would have been informative [had I known then what I know now]. Now . . . when the Holy Spirit speaks to me, or if God wants my attention, I know that he has ways of getting it. I know when he's speaking, [and] I know when I'm being directed.

I had times such as those [when] I was depending too much on myself and too much on other people. I cannot depend on other people; I don't think that we can. I don't think anyone can depend on other people; there's a certain amount that we have to, but, overall, you can't depend on other people, places or things to take care of you. There's only one sure place to put your dependence. The guidance is there; it's truly there, and you know it.

. . . It [my Christian faith] just happened within the last year . . . year-and-a-half, well, since my sobriety. It was one of the profundities of Alcoholics Anonymous. You have to find a higher power and that you don't have the strength yourself. You can't depend on other people, places, or things to do anything for you, but I can depend on God. God has always been there, and He'll always be there; it's one surety.

. . . In 1981 I got out of the service. I made the decision then that it didn't matter what I did. . . . I didn't care if I swept the floors somewhere [or] if I cleaned sewers. I didn't care what I did. I felt that I could make it; I felt that I could do it. So, when I looked at the writing on the wall, I knew that I was going to be forced out of service.

I went out and I got a job, at this place called Dairy Delivery Services, as a mechanic. During that particular time period there were a lot businesses that were going out of business, and that happened to be one of them. So I got out of the service to take a job as a mechanic at a place that went into "chapter 2," and went "belly up" shortly after. I took that job, so there again: not good.

From there I went to work for truck dealership repairing vehicles. They had a problem with selling trucks during that time. . . That's when I first heard the term "LIFO" [which meant:] "Last In, First Out." So that was the next job that went down the drain. There I went to work for a car dealership. When I got there it was another "LIFO" situation.

. . . I was watching on TV, and I saw this ad for Connecticut Trade Shop School to learn auto mechanics- learn all the techniques of auto mechanics. So, I went down there, interviewed, and went to school at Connecticut Trade Shop School. . . . While I was there they thought that I had a little bit more on the ball. I would go to school during the day at Connecticut Trade Shops, and I would teach there at night. So I was a student/teacher at Connecticut Trade Shops School while I was going to the school to learn auto mechanics. I was there for about three years after I finished. . . . They started looking at the staff and the people that were there, [and] I started getting worried. I took a postal exam, and I was

interviewed for a job in a central Massachusetts' town for the postal service. Before I got my final verification to go to work in this town for the Post Office, I quit the job at Connecticut Trade Shop School. The job for this town fell through, so there I was without a job again.

I had given up a job that I really did like, and they wouldn't take me back. So I was without a job. I went down and interviewed at Midas Muffler, and they put me to work as a manger over on Main Street here in Worcester. Within the first or six or eight months that I was there, I was rated in the top-ten managers in their corporation.

. . . I was given another chance in the post office. I took the position in a small town at the Post Office in January of '86, and I've been working there since. So that's basically where I was going and what happened to me from the time I got out of the service till today.

. . . In those times, either I was working or it seemed I was sleeping. I really didn't have to deal with outsiders that much other than a limited number of people within my sphere. So I didn't have to deal with a lot of people from the outside.

. . . I think it's a good job; I love it. I truly enjoy it. . . . I have the chance to meet people, and I can see the real good side of people. . . . It's a great people job, and I like people so it's very easy to be liked and be appreciated by people working in my position. . . . I like people, and it seems [that] they generally like me. So it's a good job, [and] I love it!

. . . I needed the camaraderie [upon returning from Vietnam], and I got it. I got it from the service. And there was support there also for what we had done and what we had gone through. . . . I really didn't have that close of ties with any of my family.

. . . I think [I've made sense of Vietnam for me]. If anything, I've turned it to a positive in my life. I think positively of people that were there. In one of my stupors, I pulled out my old address book, and I tried calling some of the old people that I'd been

stationed with over there. [However,] I wasn't able to contact anyone. It just left a question mark as to what had happened with them.

. . . I came back; I was changed. No one could go over there without being [changed]. . . . You become part of where you are; you have to. I want to use the term "to survive," that's what I feel that the term means, or what you say it means. You do that anytime that you're subjected to something that other people wouldn't be familiar with or wouldn't know. It changes you.

. . . I think one of the things about being a man, a soldier, a whatever, is that you have this certain bit of pride. You don't need anyone else. You don't have to ask anyone else, and I think that entered into that area. I didn't seek it [help]. I think many people didn't seek help because of pride, for one thing, but also the fact that you don't realize it. You don't realize that you need the assistance. There are two examples that come to mind: one is the lawyer that tries to defend himself in court, and the other is the picture of a person in a crowd. The person taking the picture of that person in the crowd can see the whole crowd and the whole picture; whereas, one individual in that crowd can only see what's ahead of him. He can't see the whole picture. They don't understand that they may need help. If [however], they're able to take themselves away and have it explained, maybe they could see the whole picture and see the necessity.

That's what I see. . . . I think it was pride. I think it was also lack of knowledge: not realizing that I needed [it] definitely. . . . I turned to alcohol to run away, to get away, to avoid feelings and to avoid many things. Now I look at alcohol as one of the problems. . . . I know now that I have to [change]. I seek out feelings; I know how important those feelings are, and I know how important the loss of those feelings is.

I know that my sobriety is very important to me. I know that God is very important to me. They are number one and number two in my life. My new extended family is very important to me. That's a replacement issue, and I'm very comfortable with the present situation that I'm in. But I know that it can be lost just as easily just by forgetting number

one and number two: my God and my sobriety. . . . It's the rock on which the building is placed. [From] God . . . I can obtain the strength to maintain my sobriety, my love of life and people. . . . [Vietnam] is a fall-back issue; it's a point of recognition. I was in Vietnam, and I just leave it there.

. . . I spent so much time in the service . . . I just wonder [if] the assimilation on my part took longer to get to and to actually do so.

. . . In the years from being in Vietnam to [the] present, much of what I suppressed [was] because I was ashamed of, or felt shame for, what I had done or not done while being there. I think it was refreshing to know that I could relate that; [I could] say what I did there or what I didn't do, and still feel good about [talking about] it. . . . In looking back over the whole situation while I was still in the service after Vietnam, I felt that because I was not a ground-pounder, an "11 bravo"--that I wasn't in a fox hole or out beating the bush, as was thought of everyone else--I felt a little bit less of a soldier or of a contributor. But in looking back I feel I did what I was required to do. I just did my time the same as everyone else that was required to go. So I felt it was refreshing and enlightening, and it took a load off of me. . . . There was not a requirement to bull-shit my way through it.

I think part of my growth in sobriety has been honesty, "to thy own self be true with life," and it has to be like that. I have to understand that. If I have a suppression of anything, I should just not do that; I shouldn't suppress it. I should allow myself to let it out and give it over to someone else to carry. I shouldn't have to carry it; I shouldn't be required to. I guess I'm learning it [not to suppress] now, or at least I'm putting it in practice now. Maybe I've known it for a long time, but I didn't believe it. Who can better take care of my problems than I? If I feel that the way to take care of them was to suppress them, then who would argue with me? I think it may have affected me in so far as thinking or worrying that someone may find out. Find out what? There was not the necessity to suppress anything. I should have just been able to accept what I did, and that's it. . . . It

has just changed the burden which I carry or which I carried [referring to these discussions that explored Vietnam in the context of my life].

Psychologically, . . . much like in my recovery, a lot of lip service is given to initially turning my life over to God, turning the problems over to God, . . . [to] let Him take care of them (in the fourth and fifth step of the twelve steps to recovery). [In] the fifth step, you're supposed to talk to another person . . . of the things that you did through your life, where you had wronged [someone] or what you feel that you had done wrong.

. . . As for how Vietnam affected me in my life, I look at it as if it was *part* of my life; it contributed, obviously. . . . I know that there's nothing I can do to correct what was done there. All I can think about is where I'm at right now. I can't worry about what happened yesterday or twenty some odd years ago. I can only worry about right now and this twenty-four hour period in which I'm in. I can't let that bother me. I'll do everything, I have done everything that I can to release that and let it go. . . . That's where I am, and that's where I should be. The program has helped re-enforce that, and also religion has helped to bring that through. . . . Without question, that's all that can be required. We can't do anything to repair what's happened in the past. We can only live with where we're at now. How you deal with your wrongs, or with the people that you've wronged, is going to affect your future. The important thing is not to make those same mistakes in the future [and] to learn from them.

. . . Right now, as for Vietnam affecting me, I know that I've had to let it go. It was suppressed, and it's gone. I don't know if I could have done so well if I had written it down first. It may have [but] I don't know if it would have helped any more. But in being able to speak it like I've done here, I've found that to be as effective--I think more effective--[then writing it out beforehand] and I don't think I needed to write it down to re-enforce it.

. . . I think one of the biggest helps is the fact of my sobriety, and letting go of dealing with it. I couldn't have done it without being sober. That has contributed

immensely. I think you have to work on one problem at a time when you have multiple problems. They're probably all interrelated. To fix the problem that may have been held in for so long, I first had to tackle the drinking. I think the first thing is you have to get rid of your dependencies. If you have a drug or an alcohol problem, that first has to be approached. I think that kind of healing has to occur before you can accept the healing of that which has been suppressed.

. . . The sobriety was what I had to put first. I had to find a way of doing that; I had to get a support zone. . . . God has placed a lot of wonderful people in my life, but I couldn't have done it unless I wanted to have it done. In working out . . . the suppression [and] many problems that I may have had from being in Vietnam, just allowing myself to say it and not be ashamed by it [was important]. . . . I know that I am forgiven, and I know that religion is very important in my life now. I had many fears throughout my life that are no longer important.

. . . I know religion is big on that, but I never would have sought the support of God and the Lord Jesus Christ if I hadn't sought my sobriety. That's all part of the recovery and part of dealing with the experience. . . I could not have moved on . . . without my sobriety.

. . .Many of the people that I've spoken with have said that it's a known fact, if you have an alcoholic priest and you put him in a room with a bottle of booze and the Bible and leave him in there, he probably would come out drunk. The reason for that is, it's very strong; it's an addiction. . . . If you can talk with people . . . [and] if you can "let go," that'll help to keep you from falling into that situation where you would be in a room by yourself with that bottle. . . . You can't do it by yourself . . . you have to have God in your life. Much like [what] the Alcoholics Anonymous says [about] having to have a higher power, my higher power is . . . the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that it's added to my life. [It's] made my life strong and made me strong.

. . . If there were a way that we could, or the professionals could, re-enforce or help a person to want their sobriety [and] to want a positive outcome, . . . that would work better. I don't know how that would be accomplished, but . . . the person has to want to do it in order to be [able] . . . to move forward.

. . . Anticipate for my future[?] In my community, I plan on remaining on the planning board. I do not plan on running for the present selectmen's position that I now set on. I plan on getting married again. I plan on buying the house that I'm presently living in. . . . I plan on continuing my sobriety. I have to for the rest of my life because I know that as long as I stay sober, my life will continue to be better. I know that I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever He wants me to go, that's where I'm going to go. As long as I feel comfortable in what I'm doing, I know that I'm going in the right direction. I feel very comfortable with many of the things that I'm presently doing in my life. . . . I know that in order for me to continue to recover, I have to help other people. . . . I know that I can help people within my community. I know that I can help people within this sphere; I know that I can help people within my AA sphere, my home group. I know when I need a meeting, I go. I know when I need to talk to someone professionally, I can make a call. I know that I can speak with people and get the support that I need to keep me going in the right direction. As for where else I want to go? I'm not sure. I know wherever God wants me to go, that's where I'm going to go. As long as I stay sober I know that it's positive. I know if I'm one drink away from not being positive, and that's where I do not want to be. So yes, it's definitely positive [referring to sense of future]. . . . What does matter is that I feel good about what's happened. . . . It's important to me to maintain my sobriety because of the possibility of what I was trained to do. My biggest fear is the fear that I might hurt someone. And if I take one drink, it can lead to that inevitable problem of a blackout where I would do something and hurt someone. My biggest fear in the world is that I would actually reach out and hurt someone in anger because I would lose a little bit of control that I presently have in my life that's caused

through my sobriety. That is my biggest fear, that I would hurt someone with rage, with anger that would be out of my control because I didn't pay attention to my sobriety. That's why I grab sobriety; I hold onto it with both arms because I have that control in my life today.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA IN THE PROFILES; SUMMARIES OF THEMES AND VARIATIONS IN THE FIVE INTERVIEWS

The entire list of categories (or topics) covered in the interviews are too numerous to analyze. An exhaustive account of these categories is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Conducting a larger analysis that yields a more complete consideration of each topic might well include additional categories (Appendix C). The categories discussed in this chapter were selected both for their common thematic content and for their high degree of relevance to the central tenants of this research: bearing witness, forming a collaborative relationship, and crafting a coherent meaningful survivor narrative.

The analysis of interview data first organized excerpts from the transcripts into categories. Then the long list of categories (see Appendix C) was examined for patterns and connections among the excerpts within those categories and for connections between the various categories. For example, all four veterans' transcripts contained the category of "childhood experiences that prepared them for Vietnam." Because there was a pattern in this category (e.g., each concluded that nothing could ever prepare them adequately for what they were about to face), a theme was discovered and therefore was included in the chapter. Patterns and connections between the various categories are called themes (Seidman, 1991).

The analysis of themes will be divided into content and process themes. Analysis of content themes focuses on the narrative material. It will search for common categories found across the veterans' narratives regarding childhood, Vietnam, returning home, and anticipation of future.

The analysis of the process themes makes up the remainder of this chapter. Analyzing process themes involves examining commonly occurring themes that are reflective and introspective in nature. While the analysis of the content looks at the stories, per se; analysis of the process examines what life after surviving war trauma has been like

and the interview experience (i.e., discussing Vietnam in the context of one's life, reading one's interview transcript, highlighting what stands out).

Content Analysis

The themes included in content analysis are: relationship to father and mother (and being understood by them); their preconceptions of war; the reasons for joining the military; things that prepared them for Vietnam; things that stood out for them in the interview; disillusionment; loyalty and camaraderie in the military; trauma stories; relationships to Vietnamese people; homecoming experiences; what was needed most upon return from Vietnam; attempts to fit into society; sharing their war experience with others; honoring those who never came back; relationships to women (divorce/separation).

Relationship to Father and Mother

The relationships to their parents described in the profiles varied, but all had something to say regarding this subject. Ernie stated how he was "abandoned" by his father at four and did not see him until he was passing through Oregon, enroute to Vietnam. He had father-figures, but none of them seemed healthy or took an active interest in him. He describes growing up without a father in the 1950s as "traumatic." His foster father was abusive and an alcoholic. Has was befriended by the town blacksmith and, shortly thereafter, sexually abused. His mother also abandoned him numerous times in childhood. Usually, she would leave Ernie and his siblings for other men. He was tormented and humiliated by his mother at other times. He described his greatest childhood challenge as, "Hey, here I am." In other words, he felt no one cared or paid attention to him.

Tim described his father as the intellectual and his mother as the emotional resource. He felt he benefited from the "kitchen table discussions" he would have with his father and brother (and sometimes his mother). In these Socratic style dialogues, he felt his opinions were respected and given credence by his father. His father would take the time and make the effort to try and understand him. His mother was largely responsible for his emotional needs. She would hear his immediate day-to-day stories, easily accessible to him and his

brother. Tim felt heard and understood by both parents but in different ways. He felt that both cared about him. His father was a W.W. II veteran. Tim discussed his experiences of Vietnam with his father to realize his father did not struggle in the same ways that Tim did with his war experience.

Glen felt he had a good relationship with his parents. He was an only child. He experienced a "structured Teutonic upbringing" where one never questioned authority and was to "follow orders." His father represented authority; his rules were clear and without ambiguity. He learned a system of honor, correctness and honesty from his upbringing. There was no overt affection expressed, although he knew he was loved. He mother was more patient with listening to his stories, although she was often busy and would listen within time limits. She would encourage him to "get to the point" and stopped him if he "went on too long." He recalls being silenced and shut down emotionally by his father. He was often not allowed to express what he felt. It was not until after Vietnam that Glen felt he had earned respect from his father. His father was a W.W. II veteran. Although they never explicitly discussed their experiences, there was an unspoken understanding. It was as if Glen had achieved a rite of passage.

Andrew's father had plans for Andrew's future that Andrew rebelled against. Andrew's refusal to follow his father's pre-designed path for his only son (among three daughters) resulted in a turbulent relationship. He regrets that his father only participated in about two or three significant activities with him growing up. His father was busy in local politics and running his business. He describes him as a man of great loyalty and incredible principles. Andrew's mother remained in his father's shadow, never really disagreeing with him in any apparent way. As a child, Andrew was determined to be heard in his family. He did not allow others to silence him, but would always find ways to get an audience with his parents. Although he experienced difficulty with his father in childhood, he made peace with him before his death. His father was never a veteran, but honored veterans through political action (i.e., ceremonies, monuments).

All of the veterans seemed to deeply need their father's approval. For Ernie, it was never quite available. Andrew tried to please his father but realized he had to set out on his own. It took years to make peace with his father. Glen seemed to notice that once he returned from Vietnam, his father treated him differently, like an equal or an adult (i.e., he took Glen to his favorite bars). Tim seemed to have his father's approval (as expressed through his father's efforts to spend time talking and trying to understand him) through childhood. He connected to his father in novel ways to discuss war experiences after Vietnam. Of the two parents, the veterans gave more emphasis to their relationship to their father in the interviews.

Preconceptions of War

Glen and Andrew associated John Wayne movies with their preconceptions of war. For them, it would be heroic and glorious. Ernie was not clear on what to expect; he had few preconceptions. He just wanted to leave New York state. Tim gained his preconceptions from talking with W.W. II veterans at the VA where his father worked. He learned that war was hard work, very dirty, and extreme contrasts of boredom and adrenaline rushes. Except for Tim--who had unusually high exposure to the stories of combat veterans--all veterans lacked preparatory preconceptions of what war was really like.

Reasons for Joining the Military

Each participant had different reasons for joining the military. Tim is the only participant that was drafted. He considered evading the draft but chose to serve his time. Ernie felt the military would be a "new" beginning for him. The lure of a free bus ticket, lodging and spending money--just to take military aptitude exams--was irresistible and exciting to him. Andrew felt going to Vietnam was the "right" thing to do. He had experienced friends' bodies returning from the war and felt a sense of obligation. He went in spite of his father's efforts to deter him. Glen initially felt that he went out of a sense of

obligation, but later in life realized he went to see if he could do it--to see if he could face and conquer the extreme challenge of it.

Things that Prepared Them for Vietnam

Each veteran had thoughts about possible events that in some way prepared them for Vietnam. It is important to note one caveat: they agreed that nothing could have really prepared an individual for Vietnam. Nevertheless, the following experiences were seen as helpful. Glen noted that his militaristic childhood (i.e., structured rigid childhood lifestyle) where he was, at times, literally under orders, helped him in command situations. Much was expected of him without excuses. Andrew was adamant that there is no preparation for Vietnam. He did describe two influences that assisted him. The first was his father-in-law's teaching him the use of a compass and map for land navigation in the forests of Northern New England. The second was his sense of "right and wrong" and loyalty toward others and values instilled in him in childhood. Tim believed that the kitchen table discussions helped him immensely because they taught him the ability to escape mentally, or to see things and look at them from several sides simultaneously. In this way, the many years of in-depth discussions "helped keep me sane." He also had the advantage of hearing many W.W. II veterans discuss their war experiences in the VA. Ernie believed that his difficult childhood taught him self-reliance which was a valuable coping skill in Vietnam.

Things that Stood Out for Them in Their Interview

At the end of the first interview, which dealt with life prior to Vietnam, the veterans were asked to reflect on anything that stood out for them from the interview. Andrew was struck by the absence of joint activity with his father and the lack of a strong father-son bond. Ernie highlighted his need for acceptance and approval from others, the lack of receiving adequate nurturing for his well being throughout childhood and adolescence, his instability (i.e., multiple homes and families) throughout childhood, the progress and growth in coming to terms with a painful past, and the absence of resentment toward people in his past. Glen noticed from his interview how he re-admitted "lying" to himself

for many years, chose to *not* make friends by keeping others at a distance, learned what real honor is from those he commanded who lost their lives in Vietnam, came to an understanding of who he truly is, and he learned from Vietnam that he is a better person than he ever thought he was. Tim shared his surprise from discussing things that he had not anticipated discussing. He noticed from his interview a split between rational and emotional sides in his family, how certain experiences conditioned him for Vietnam, the contrast between his "philosophical" side and his more pragmatic "day-by-day-in-the-trenches" side and how different they are from each other, his sense of moral duty (i.e., civil rights involvement) and his participation in an ambiguous war, the benefits of having a loving, appreciative and understanding family and how sharing his story prompted him to look at it his past from novel vantage points.

Disillusionment

Disillusionment was commonplace in the experience of the veterans. Andrew shared about the absolute insanity of a Christmas cease-fire that cost the lives of numerous American soldiers. The Vietnamese took full advantage of such an opportunity by reinforcing troops and supplies. Tim described the images of American oil companies' insignia cluttering the skyline of the South China Sea. It was tempting for Tim to believe that the United States was more concerned in protecting its petroleum interests than the Vietnamese people. When Ernie was demoted to Nhatrang, he witnessed rampant drug use and alcohol dependence by most of the personnel he was serving with. The attitude was apathetic. Glen received orders to conduct a mission with his men that basically used them to act as a "buffer" and an "alarm detector." This mission was an extremely dangerous extension of his men's time; they had served their time and were ready to return home to the US when they were sent out into the field.

Loyalty and Camaraderie in the Military

There were many instances in the veterans' stories that illustrated strong loyalty and camaraderie. Andrew told how important one was to his unit in Vietnam--a type of

importance that does *not* translate to civilian life. If the unit did not cooperate or work as a team, it faced extinction. The loyalty still persists in the form of honoring those soldiers killed in action. Some of the veterans missed the camaraderie that they experienced in Vietnam once they returned home.

Relationships to Vietnamese People

Ernie, Tim and Andrew all had positive things to say about the Vietnamese people. Even Glen respected the skill of the Viet Cong. Ernie observed the more relaxed and accepting attitude he observed among the civilians. Tim treated many Vietnamese civilians in medical emergencies. He also participated in the orphanage. Andrew vowed to never abandon a Montengard Indian who became wounded on a mission. There was an appreciation for the civilians of Vietnam.

Homecoming Experiences

Each of the veterans had unique homecoming experiences. Ernie stayed in the military for many years after Vietnam. He did not socialize with the civilian population very much while in the military. Andrew returned home bearing an intimidating weapon; he did not hear any protesters accusing him of any acts. He was thankful for not having been exposed to protesters, for he feared he might react violently if he had. He was apprehensive of being called a baby killer because of traumatic experience involving the little girl. He spend two weeks in the hospital upon return, and then, at his father's request, delved into the family business. He regretted not taking a break before he returned to work. Glen Spent months in the hospital before flying home. He returned home on a cargo plane in GI pajamas. Upon landing at 4:00 am, he was told that he had arrived too early. He actually woke up the personnel in the welcoming station who quickly scrambled to find them some donuts and coffee and arrange for connecting flights. He then flew to St. Louis and felt like a "freak show" in the airport, wearing pajamas and having his head sutures exposed to the public. When his parents saw him, they were obviously upset despite their efforts to not look upset. Tim recalls helping to save the life of a little girl in Vietnam as one of the last

activities he did in Vietnam. Upon arriving in California, he was confronted at the airport (a public airport) by a women protester who asked him how many babies he had killed today. He began to climb the fence to assault her out of sheer rage but was restrained by his fellow soldiers.

What was Needed Most Upon Return from Vietnam

Although none of the veterans expected parades to acknowledge their efforts and sacrifices like the ones that occurred for returning W.W. II veterans, neither did they expect the criticism, anger and pressure to forget the war and put it behind them that they met with upon return. The participants respond differently to the question of what they needed upon returning home. Tim admitted he did not know what he needed when he returned. He supposed, in retrospect, he needed to "put some distance on his experience that was all in his head," to put it "behind me." It was difficult for Tim to know how much societal pressure affected his ideal of what he needed most, since society was actively urging veterans to put their experience behind them. Ernie needed to reestablish the rank and status that he lost in Vietnam by applying himself to the military. He focused almost exclusively on career advancement in the military. Andrew immediately stated that "understanding" was what he needed most and never received upon return from Vietnam. He needed to talk about it but could not find people who could understand what he had experienced. He was afraid to begin to disclose to someone for fear that they might criticize him. It was several years after he returned from Vietnam that someone said, "Welcome home!" This simple statement (made by another veteran) left him in tears. He had not felt welcomed by society upon his return. Glen needed someone to say "thank you" to him, to appreciate his sacrifice. Except for his parents and a few friends, no one thanked him. He felt others wanted him to forget Vietnam, to "sweep it under the rug." He felt that society gave no recognition to those who served their country in war.

Attempts to Fit into Society

Except for Ernie--who remained in the military after the war--all tried to assimilate into society; no one felt that he fully succeeded. They believed the reason for not succeeding seemed to be found in *how* they tried to assimilate. They tried to fit into society by forgetting Vietnam. Glen described his efforts to be a "chameleon" around others, giving others what he felt they wanted. Andrew went directly into the business, fulfilling his father's expectations of what he "should" do. Tim attempted to be the "solid citizen" he thought he should be (and it was what his father did upon returning from W.W. II). These efforts for all three proved unsuccessful from the standpoint that Vietnam could not be ignored or "forgotten." Vietnam needed to be faced and resolved regardless of what society told them they should do.

Sharing Their War Experience with Others

The common experience shared by these participants was to avoid discussing Vietnam with others. Glen buried his experience of Vietnam believing that not only did people *not* want to hear about it, but that it was counterproductive to even admit one was a Vietnam veteran. For instance, in the business realm, Glen believed admitting one was a veteran meant, "you were almost ostracized because you were crazy, you were on drugs or you were totally anti-social and could go off and kill hundreds of people instantly . . . if the wrong thing upsets you." Ernie avoided discussing his experiences with other officers because of the tendency to embellish the "stories" if one was not a front-line grunt. He felt ashamed that he did not do more in Vietnam and resigned himself to silence. When Tim was invited to discuss Vietnam, it was often to debate political issues associated with the war. He did not feel others wanted to listen or understand his experience. He also had reservations about discussing Vietnam because he believed others to not be capable of understanding Vietnam and/or he did not want to evoke negative stereotypes about being a veteran. He attempted to be politically active after Vietnam, but felt burned out, and felt that such activity no longer seemed meaningful to him like it did in earlier years. Since he had

moved to New England and lacked close friends, he resigned himself to being a "solid citizen." Andrew believed people would listen to his experience only if they were positive, for instance, if he told others he played in the band. People were not interested in hearing the truth of what it was like for him. He was told he gave off an intimidating impression to others (i.e., the "thousand-yard stare") and saw how this might have kept people from discussing Vietnam with him. His family felt that *not* talking about Vietnam was the best way to cope. He talked about Vietnam only when he drank, which he felt was not healthy. In retrospect, he is unsure if he was ready to talk about Vietnam for several years after he returned. He did not know if he really was not ready to talk, or if he received messages from others that he should *not* talk about it.

Honoring Those Who Never Came Back

There is reverence that exists to honor those who sacrificed their lives in Vietnam by the veterans who survived. Andrew and Glen have both expressed their sense of obligation to the deceased soldiers by upholding their memory in honor. Glen has felt that he should have died in place of some who had more to offer to the world than he. They both feel that their own healing and reentry into life is one way to honor those who died. This issues was not spontaneously addressed by Tim and Ernie like it was with Andrew and Glen.

Relationships to Women

All have had significant difficulty managing relationships with women since Vietnam. Three of them have been married at least twice, and they attribute many difficulties in their relationships to women to the effects of their Vietnam experience. Even Andrew who has never been divorced, spent many years separated, living a high-risk lifestyle before reconciling with his spouse and family. Ernie's drinking, Tim's emotional distance, Andrew's need to live life with some degree of risk and excitement, and Glen's inability to feel or be vulnerable in the presence of women all have posed obstacles in their relationships.

Process Analysis

The themes included in process analysis are more reflectional in nature, capturing the participant's efforts toward introspectional understanding. The process-related material addressed in this section is one step removed from the veteran telling his story (i.e., content analysis); rather, he is commenting on what sharing in this manner was like for him. The themes addressed include: precipitating events that resulted in the confrontation of the traumatic experience and efforts helpful toward that end; the experience of participating in this interview process (i.e., what it was like for them); their subjective experience of living with the Vietnam trauma; the degree to which they have integrated and/or made sense of Vietnam in the context of their lives; what fosters hope, well-being and a sense of future; messages they have for those who want to help veterans; the role of society in hurting and/or helping them.

Due to the fact that this research emphasizes the words of the participants, and much of the more abstract reflectional material was omitted in the profiles, this section will use the veterans' responses as its preferred way of describing process-related themes. The drawback to this approach is its considerable length (i.e., large amounts of text will be taken from the transcripts so that the participants can be represented by their own words). When the drawbacks associated with length are weighed against the drawbacks of summation (which brevity would entail), this research chooses the problems associated with being lengthy and cumbersome. In an attempt to find a compromise, summations of each participant as well as section summaries will be provided in this chapter with corresponding quotations occurring in respective appendices.

Precipitating Events that Resulted in the Confrontation of the Traumatic Experience and Efforts Helpful Toward that End

The residual aftermath of Vietnam was keenly felt in the life of each veteran. However, coming to terms with the experience was not easy, immediate or accomplished in a linear step-by-step process. Each participant confronted his trauma following different

precipitating events. Each found strategies that were helpful toward acknowledging and resolving his traumatic encounter. This section will describe--through summarization of interview data--events leading up to their confrontation with Vietnam, and it will elaborate on strategies found to cope with the effects from the war, including experiences in counseling.

Andrew. Andrew first confronted his experience of Vietnam after attending a Special Forces reunion. Once he was at the reunion, he talked to his former buddies and learned of the recent suicide of one close buddy; he felt guilt for not remaining in contact with him. At the reunion, he was reminded of some of the missions that he had been on by those who had accompanied him on the missions in Vietnam. He had forgotten about these missions. Attending this reunion began his psychological decline.

Andrew has addressed his traumatic experience in different therapeutic contexts, including inpatient hospitalizations and outpatient therapies. He believes therapy is valuable in dealing with trauma resolution. Andrew believes that therapy serves to provide a place to "get it out," meaning the details of the trauma experience that continue to plague him. He has learned to exercise care and good judgment in where and with whom he discloses.

He has had unfortunate experiences trying to receive help from the Veterans Administration (VA). He believes the VA customarily treats PTSD with pills and he disagrees with healing through psychopharmacological interventions alone. He admits Vietnam veterans can be "tough" patients, but disagrees with managing their needs medically.

His helpful--possibly life-saving--hospitalizations included "caring" clinicians that extended "dignity" to him. His depiction of therapy is that it was like taking medicine; it is good and healing but the effects are not immediate. When he avails himself of therapy, he has "less things to think about" when he leaves the office. There are times when one doesn't want therapy, but it is important to persevere nevertheless and continue it. He states: "The days when you don't want to go are the days when you have to go. That came

from a lot of experience *not* going on the days I had to." Andrew describes his desperate times of feeling as if he is ". . . on the steep canyon wall hanging on by my fingernails," and refers to therapy as a rope thrown to him.

As far as the extent of healing, he feels that there are limitations. Some aspects of what he has done will always be there; he's "tagged" with them and must accept this. He has learned not to dwell on these aspects. He sees his healing progression as going from being totally unaware of Vietnam, to being consumed by Vietnam, to relating to Vietnam only as a "part of me," a part he no longer dwells on. He has not found the balance between being consumed by Vietnam and remaining in a healthy relationship, but he is certainly getting there. His message to other vets needing help but reluctant to receive it is that they should go to get treatment in the name of those vets who never came home. He remains active in pursuing his healing.

Ernie. Ernie had never made explicit efforts to confront and heal from his Vietnam experience. He never sought counseling for help in coping with it. He believes that the two factors that may have detoured him from doing so were his alcoholism and his prolonged time in the military post-Vietnam. In relationship to the later, while in the military there was pressure to exaggerate one's military record so one was perceived as a "grunt" and/or "hero." He felt ashamed of his Vietnam experience because it was not as heroic or perilous, in his thinking, as others' experience.

Involvement in this research was his first attempt to confront his Vietnam experience and its effect upon his life. He participated with the hopes of understanding his Vietnam experience and using the opportunity to complete his "fourth step" and "fifth step" of his Alcoholics Anonymous program.[1] He shares in the fifth interview, that his experience with two failed marriages and now tension in his current engagement has made him face the likelihood that he has some issues he needs to confront regarding Vietnam.

He copes by keeping Vietnam only "part" of his life (as opposed to an all-consuming force), living in the present (but learning from the past) and "letting go" of the

past (in the parlance of AA). He also incorporates religion into his life, drawing strength from his faith. It has not always been this way for him.

Before AA and finding his religious faith, he was drinking ". . . to run away, to get away, to avoid feelings and to avoid many things." At that point in his life, alcohol was seen as a solution, not a problem. Currently, with the guiding help of AA, Ernie will "seek out feelings," look to his Higher Power for strength, hope and consistency, live in the present (versus dwelling on the past), learn from his mistakes, and make amends for wrongs committed against himself and others. It was only after the influence of AA that Ernie saw the need to address Vietnam and deal with its negative influence on his life.

Tim. Tim got to a point in his life where he felt he would either deal with Vietnam or ". . . I'm probably headed for an early grave, or, before the third marriage is going to break down. . . ." He only began addressing his experience through writing six years ago. Prior to this, he tried his hardest to "put it behind me" and be a "solid citizen." The two major factors in him confronting his traumatic experience were therapy and writing. He saw a psychologist fifteen year ago who was helpful, although Tim wasn't convinced Vietnam was playing a significant role in his struggles at the time. The psychologist did not solicit his story or engage in an interactive way. What he did do was provoke Tim to consider what impact Vietnam might be having on his life. From that provocation, he experienced a ten year "gestation" period before he began to clearly see how Vietnam was impacting him. Now, he feels closer to Vietnam than he did the first few years after he returned. His relationship to Vietnam is more animated, flexible and dynamic. For many years after returning, he felt stuck, or "frozen," in regard to his traumatic imagery. He tried to avoid it.

Writing was instrumental in Tim's healing from the war. Writing allowed Tim to objectify and crystallize his experience, actually, making it seem more real. He describes writing as helping him to "codify my perspective. . . as opposed to just being this kind of amorphous massive stuff that floats in your head." He was able to re-create his experience

as he wrote of it in different ways from different perspectives. Writing also helped him formulate a perspective on his identity, something he referred to as always changing. He quotes E. M. Forrester who says, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say," believing that writing teaches him about himself. He would write when he sensed something "bubbling up" that he needed to deal with more overtly. He had kept a journal since college, but stopped after Vietnam--until six years ago, when he resumed writing.

He described his distressing memories of Vietnam as "snapshots." He refused to deal with these snapshots, trying to hide the "photo album" containing them. This had the effect of his snapshots turning into slides that began their unbidden slide show. These slides got "fixed" or frozen in his mind, and it was only writing about them that seemed to restore fluidity to them. He found that putting his experience into words and then reading them had a different and much needed effect in his healing. Writing objectifies his experience in a way that allows for resolution of conflicting or painful experience. As far as whether anything could have decreased the time it took for him to confront his experience, it is uncertain. However, he would have liked to have been given the opportunity (to face and recover from his trauma) had society made his homecoming more supportive.

Glen. Initially, Glen felt he had no problem with PTSD from Vietnam. It was not until "things started falling apart" that he acknowledged that there was a problem. His problem with Vietnam developed later in life. He suspects that healing from his wounds, that required extended time in the service, acted as a transition for him to return home. Although he doesn't say it, his time in the CIA may have been an extension of Vietnam (i.e., counterphobic behavior) which may have acted to delay his efforts to come to terms with Vietnam. Glen did not want to remember Vietnam and was aided by a society that also wanted to forget. Glen could handle society's "forgetting," but not society's dishonor. He was confronted with his Vietnam experience by the Vietnam Memorial. This was followed by writing his book which he now describes as extremely therapeutic. During the writing of it, it was very difficult and painful.

Glen, like Tim, found help through writing and counseling. His writing turned into an obsessional need to complete his story of Vietnam by writing a book. His book began as a fictional attempt, but it quickly turned into his non-fictional autobiographical account of Vietnam. He sees his book as therapeutic. He states: "Once I could look at it in print, in chronological form, in some degree of simplicity and order, it made it much much easier to deal with." The process of writing--of putting order to his experience--was "disgustingly hard." He knew he needed to get this experience out of him and therefore was able to withstand the pain associated with writing. He described going through a box of Kleenex while typing at his computer. He spent nine months staying up late into the night "to get this stuff out." His story flowed, like "projectile vomiting." In fact, it felt as if he could not stop! His mind went to the story every waking moment; he couldn't do anything else but write. Others tried to help him take breaks, but he refused their attempts to help.

He states that the completion of his book was the start--and much more--of the healing process; he figures it was 80 percent of the process. When done with the book, he felt relief that he could deal with and face things he had never been able to confront before. These issues still hurt, but they were bearable. In concluding his book, he depicts the process in this way: "I crossed the bridge. . . . It's like I'd made my peace with those guys, and I'd finally accepted the fact of what happened to them. It was done! Over! . . . [It was a way of bringing honor] to them."

His invitation by a friend to a local Vet Center began his admission that he had problems from Vietnam. In fact, he estimated that sixty percent of his thought was devoted to Vietnam on an unconscious basis. After working hard to resolve his Vietnam experience, he sees that he had needed to go through the rough times in order to heal. He sees healing as a learning process. He is able to "put Vietnam aside" at this point in his life.

Initially, counseling "hurt too much," so he did not receive it on a regular basis. He was grateful that the counselors forced him to be honest. Glen had spent many years "hiding" in the mental health system, knowing the "right" things to say to avoid attracting

attention or disclosing his own intense internal struggle. The counselors ". . . would not let me lie to myself. They refused to believe the little minuets and stories that I was giving. . . ." The counselors' persistent confrontation led to him finally "breaking down" and telling the "truth."

Summation. All four veterans spent a significant amount of time prior to dealing with Vietnam. Three of the four utilized professional mental health services to address Vietnam; each found counseling helpful. The fourth veteran (Ernie), used professional services to address marital issues which may have been indirectly related to Vietnam. Two of the veterans found writing to be an invaluable tool in their healing. It appears that all four of the veterans confronted their Vietnam experience, not due to a proactive effort to resolve it, but because of significant life problems that arose from it. All have made notable gains in their efforts to understand and resolve their traumatic past.

The Experience of Participating in this Process

This research is very interested in what participating in this process--consisting of interviews (telling their story), transcripts (witnessing their story), and witnessing others' stories--was like for them. Due to the value placed on this data and its significance to the overall scope of this investigation, large amounts of interview text will be used in order to fully grasp the account given by each veteran elucidating their participation experience.

Andrew. Andrew compares the process of participating in this research to his eight years of therapy and two hospitalizations. He describes what it was like for him below:

> . . . Images are like disks attached by a string. You know, when you pull one, a few more come along with it. [There is] nothing you can do. But I don't want to be opening up cans of worms all over the place. I've done enough; I've done more than I think I should do [in sharing my story today]. I know it's good and there's a healing property to it, but it doesn't make it any easier.
>
> . . . I'm in a place where I can speak . . . I mean, a place where a strong man can be a little weak. That's the name of the tune right there.

And. . . you need to allow yourself to be a little weak. [It] doesn't mean you're not a man, [it] just means you need to drop your guard a little to be able to do that. I don't think there are but a few instances and situations where you should do it. And if you find those--if you're fortunate enough to find them--I think it's beneficial. . . . But I hope other people . . . that have been through this, find help if they need it. I think everybody needs some kind of help; understanding is help. Understanding is help. I think that I've been fortunate.

. . . I've been doing a lot of thinking about all of the meetings and all that we've talked about. It was a lot harder than I thought [it would be], for me. I perceived it to be kind of like resurrecting some of the bad times [and] some of the good times, and I would just go on with it. I found that I've been stuck on different parts of it. Mostly, I've felt some pain from [it] which I really didn't think I would. But I think the pain is good. I think that. . . it's the *right* time to do it. I've handled talking about it differently than when I was in the hospital [and] differently than any other time, although there aren't a lot of times I've talked about it. But I handled it differently. It's probably good. Maybe it's the right time, maybe the right time. But I don't think I'm foolish enough *now* to ever think it's going to be easier to dig into that bag and pull out the things that aren't comfortable to look at.

. . . [This process has been] kind of like *cleansing*. I've heard the statement used before, and I really get a lot of relief out of listening to it. You are cleansed by these kinds of endeavors. But I think it has [cleansed me], I think it has. It's made me feel like a boxer getting hit, where you reel a little bit. But I'm standing back up again. I'm not going home torturing my wife over what I'm doing now, so things have changed; I've matured. I think I have it in the right place. But I don't think it's ever going to be easy to talk about.

. . . It was totally different than anything I had done before. And by that I mean, it was different because what I said was transcribed, and I read it. That made a big difference to me; as a person, that made a big difference to me. It had a different effect on me. I had, through the years, been through both hospitalizations and therapy, [but] I had never read what I had said. I had never had it put into, or caused it to be put into print. There's something *different* about reading it. Now I'm talking about reading the

context of it and thinking about it. It's different than saying it, leaving the room, and trying to forget about it. It's different. I don't know if I can explain it 100 percent in clarity, except that I think that it had more of an effect saying it, having it transcribed, then reading it myself and thinking about what I was reading. I don't know why. I don't have the answer, but it definitely had a different effect. I feel like after all of this, it's shown me--and I don't know if it's *done* it for me--but I think it's *shown me* I'm in a better place than I was five years ago. It's taught me *that* by reading what I had said, then going over it and highlighting portions of it that were meaningful to me. So it's made--it's a *different* experience. I've been through eight years of therapy, and I've been through two hospitalizations about this, so whatever it has done is *different.* I think coming to the end of it--I'm happy I'm coming to the end of it without a question--but I think I've learned a little more about myself. And that is that. I'm even stronger than I thought I was, at this point.

. . . Having gone through a lot of therapy and having been in groups with other guys, [I see] this [as being] different. It's a different way of looking at it. It could also have something to do with my age. . . . I'm a little older, a little wiser now, from having gone through a bad time. But it's totally different. . . . It's not like seeing somebody once a week. This is more patient participation, and you don't get that from a therapist. You might get some [participation]. You'll answer questions and you'll get a chance--on a good day you feel like talking, or a bad day you feel like talking, whatever that may be--you'll participate somewhat, but it's not like this. This is a different kind of participation because you see what you said and you need to work. You have to read it over and think about if you're going to highlight spots that are important to you.

. . . What it was like reflecting upon it, is that I realized it's *not* my whole life. . . . It's a real big part of my life that I tried to bury for a long time because it was not convenient to think about it. It's a real big part of my life. I really am proud of a lot of it. Other parts of it have a lot of pain attached to it. The parts with pain are difficult, they remain difficult, they are going to, I think, remain difficult. The parts that I'm proud about, I'm still proud of them.

To go through it again and go through it in this context, I think--and I'll tell you more as time goes on--I think it was good. I think it showed

me, in a more immediate sense, where I am today. Therapy doesn't always show you that. It doesn't show it to you. It doesn't show you where you are in that moment each time you leave that office. You might feel a little better sometimes. If you're doing work, you might feel worse. But this--over the course of the months I've been involved with this--this has made me look at myself. That's what I'm trying to get at: it had made me look at myself and had made me look at things I've said, which is really looking at *myself* on the paper. I think it makes me feel a little better.

. . . I'm not made up of just my Vietnam experience. My life before that [Vietnam] affected things before I went to Vietnam. Everybody's life does, whether it's good, bad or indifferent. As you grow up, all of us carry certain baggage with us. . . . That doesn't necessarily mean everybody's walking around with bags full of trauma or bags full of very hurtful things. It's just part of your life. Whatever you are, you're made up of experiences. Your experiences, both with your family, friends and siblings, growing up, is your package when you go into the military. You still have it with you, you don't forget it. If things have affected you in a certain way. . . the military doesn't strip all that from you. They may strip out the present and try to reform you as a soldier--and usually they are able to that--but they don't strip out who you were or how you were brought up, what kind of problems [you had] or how smooth your life went. They don't do that; you carry that with you and you go on. So if you put the three of them [together]--before, during and after--it gives you a picture of the context. Some people who are vastly troubled *after* Vietnam, were vastly troubled *before* Vietnam. I'm not negating the difficulties that some have had to deal with at all, that's just a fact of life. I think you need to separate it to deal with it, but you need to take it in the context of everything else.

. . . And in the largest fashion, [I feel I am] *taking part;* I'm taking part in it [the interview process]. I don't feel like I've really done that before. . . . I can't tell you if this is really valuable until later. But it's already been a month since I said that, and I can tell you now, it's a *different* experience. I can't see that as anything *but* healthy. And I wish I would have [tried this earlier]; maybe this might have helped some years ago--to do it this way.

Andrew states numerous times that the experience was beneficial, but that it was not an easy process to complete. Initially, he thought the interviews would be without challenge or intense pain. He discovered he was mistaken for parts of it were very difficult for him. He described the process as a "cleansing" experience, and as an experience similar to a boxer reeling from blows who gets back up after he's been knocked down.

He found the interviews to be a place where a "strong man can be a little weak." He thought it important that one gives himself permission to be "weak," to "drop your guard" for a while. He stated that opportunities that allow one to be safely vulnerable are rare and need to be seized when they present themselves.

Since the material shared is often disturbing in nature, the right audience needs to be found. Otherwise, sharing one's toxic experience with family can have an adverse effect. When one does share, and it is in the appropriate context, the understanding one receives is helpful in itself.

Andrew most frequently described his involvement in the process as "different" for several reasons. It is different than all his previous attempts to address his trauma, including therapy and hospitalization. It is different in that there is active participation on his part; he is "taking part." He reads and highlights his own interviews. He noted that his therapy does not involve such active participation. Another difference is that it shows him his own growth over time. He sees he is in a better place today than in his past. He sees where he is today and has awareness that traditional therapy doesn't give him. It is different in that he views his war experience in the context of his past, present and future. He has observed how the different time contexts have come together to form his life and sees value in separating these time periods in this sequence.

He believes he has learned many things from participating. He has learned more about himself, and how strong he really is in confronting the trauma of Vietnam. He has looked at himself and his words and feels better having done so. He realized from the interviews that his Vietnam experience is only a part of his life, not his whole life; but in

time past, it became his whole life, feeling overwhelming. He wondered what could have been possible if this experience had been available to him earlier in his life.

Ernie. Ernie's participation in this study represents the first time he has ever shared his Vietnam experience to anyone. He coordinated telling his story with working his "steps" from Alcoholics Anonymous. One important silencing factor in Ernie's life was his sense of shame over not doing enough in Vietnam. He felt others would criticize him, or look upon him pejoratively, for not being in the "bush." He had been in environments (i.e., in Germany) where veterans lied or embellished their Vietnam experience due to the pressure to be seen as heroic. Ernie's experience participating in the interviews is given below:

> . . . I can't think of anyone that I really sat down and told it to, other than right here with you. [It's been] almost 24 years [since Vietnam]. I don't talk about my childhood to too many people either. Maybe it was a decision [the fact that I don't talk about my childhood or Vietnam]; It just, it could be a decision to not have it come up. . . as much as anything else, to avoid it, to avoid speaking of it. Whenever I've spoken with other vets, it's been their way of avoiding it as well. They've avoided it. I've read in the Bible that it's good to confess in front of God and another human being. Actually it comes from the Twelve Steps. I guess probably, I was thinking to use this as a Fifth Step, and it seemed like a good idea to me. Even though I haven't written this down, I know that it will be. That will take care of my Forth Step.
>
> . . . I'm using this [these interviews] as a tool. As I said, I'm using this as my fifth step. It's like taking a burden off my shoulders. I'm sure when I walk out of here, I'll feel like I'm that 175 pounds again. I don't know how much content there is in this, in what I've given you this evening, but no matter how little or how much I did or what I've put in here, it's been what I needed. . . . It's what I needed. So, if. you can do something good for yourself and good for someone else, you've done good.
>
> . . . It seemed like it was a much shorter time than I was actually in here speaking, and I felt good to leave; it felt like a burden had been lifted.

. . . Right now, as for Vietnam affecting me, I know that I've had to let it go. It was suppressed, and it's gone. I don't know if I could have done so well if I had written it down first. It may have, [but] I don't know if it would have helped any more. But in being able to speak it like I've done here, I've found that to be as effective--I think more effective--[then writing it out beforehand] and I don't think I needed to write it down to re-enforce it.

. . . In the years from being in Vietnam to [the] present, much of what I suppressed [was] because I was ashamed of, or felt shame for, what I had done or not done while being there. I think it was refreshing to know that I could relate that; [I could] say what I did there or what I didn't do, and still feel good about [talking about] it.

. . . In working out . . . the suppression [and] many problems that I may have had from being in Vietnam, just allowing myself to say it and not be ashamed by it [was important].

. . . In looking back over the whole situation while I was still in the service after Vietnam, I felt that because I was not a ground-pounder, an "11 bravo"--that I wasn't in a fox hole or out beating the bush, as was thought of everyone else--I felt a little bit less of a soldier or of a contributor. But in looking back I feel I did what I was required to do. I just did my time the same as everyone else that was required to go. So I felt it was refreshing and enlightening, and it took a load off of me.

. . . There was not a requirement to bull-shit my way through it [in these interviews]. I think part of my growth in sobriety has been honesty, "to thy own self be true with life," and it has to be like that. I have to understand that. If I have a suppression of anything, I should just not do that; I shouldn't suppress it. I should allow myself to let it out and give it over to someone else to carry. I shouldn't have to carry it; I shouldn't be required to. I guess I'm learning it [how to not suppress] now, or at least I'm putting it in practice now.

. . . Who can better take care of my problems than I? If I felt that the way to take care of them was to suppress them, then who would argue with me? I think it may have affected me in so far as thinking or worrying that someone may find out. Find out what? There was not the necessity to suppress anything. I should have just been able to accept what I did, and

that's it. . . . It [these discussions the explored Vietnam in the context of my life] has just changed the burden which I carry or which I carried.

. . . That's a necessity I believe, yes [referring to the need to have someone listen to you share]. It's one thing to talk to God and let it go; but God doesn't speak directly to people, he talks *through* people. I can pray and talk with God; and I should, and we should. But it's also important to talk with people and tell them because it's part of the witness.

. . . Definitely, definitely, without question [there's healing in witnessing]. . . . You can see where I presently am, but until I tell you how I got here [you would lack understanding]; you could visualize and think about it, but you wouldn't really know. . . . I may find that [telling the story of how I got to where I am] important to get off my chest or to relate to you. . . . I think that would be applicable to Vietnam. What I did . . . was part of my life; it was one of the routes that I took to get to my present location, whether it's my psyche, my location in life or location within the community. I think in explaining that, we kind of map out our route as to how we got to where we presently are. . . . Or they [people] wouldn't care about what route. What's important to . . . me is the details of that route that I took to get to where I am. That's important to me. . . . If I can get that across, it somehow makes me feel better about myself. If I can tell you of the trip and how I had to get here, it somehow makes me feel better. . . . Somehow in relating how we got here, it does make us feel better. It makes me feel better, and that's important. It is important. It does lessen the load; it has lessened the load.

. . . It [the interview process] has made me look back at my tour, and it has lessened the load. In fact, I've even taken the opportunity to talk with my fiancee about that. I've basically told her what I've told you, and it seemed to come out much easier. So, it has done a lot; it has made me feel better about it.

. . . It's been very positive [referring to the interviews]. I don't mean that in a light way. It's something that I needed that I didn't know that I needed; I'll admit that. . . . I don't think it [this form of research] should be restricted to just Vietnam veterans. . . . I think that you probably could go to any situation where people were held under stress or found themselves under stressful situations for a period of time. Basically, what

you've done here could be good for anyone that placed themselves in situations where they needed to be counseled.

. . . It's been a pleasurable trip, and it's been a relief. It's been good.

Ernie found sharing his story valuable; it was the first time he had done so in twenty-four years. He routinely avoids discussing Vietnam and his childhood experience. His AA program endorses the value of "witnessing," of telling one's story to another. In doing so, he found it to be like "taking a burden off my shoulders." He said it was what he needed, even though he did not know he needed it (until afterwards). Ernie described the experience as refreshing, as he shared events that he had "suppressed" for years due to shame. He believed that there is healing in having one's story witnessed. He also believes that telling another *how* he has gotten to where he is at is vital, if one is to understand him. He felt that the interviews were able to get him on the path that brought him to where he is today. Just being understood fully, in this way, made him feel "better." Looking back over his life not only "lessened the load," it was also contagious. He shared some of his story with his fiancee and felt good about doing so. He felt very positive about participating, stating that the applications for such a process could be readily replicated with any traumatized population.

Tim. Tim compared his experience with these interviews and reading his transcripts to his writing. He found participation to be positively stimulating, as noted in the following passages:

. . . It was interesting because as much as I write, one of the things that happens is you tend to keep "circling the wagons" in the same pattern, so to speak. And what doing this does is [that it introduces novelty in thought patterns]. Some of the questions were like an Indian coming in from a point that you weren't expecting. So it means you have to shift the wagons a little bit. I always enjoy seeing how the wagons might shift.

. . . There's a quote from E. M. Forrester who says, "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" . . . I just thought, "Yes, that's true." I mean, I think I know what I think, but when I *see* what I think it's sometimes different from what I thought I think. It just is a way of kind of objectifying yourself.

. . . This is probably the first time I've really tried to--other than in stories which tend to be more metaphorical--articulate for someone else how I got from point "A" to point "B". That's been good. It helps crystallize it some.

. . . It [the talk] was good. It was [good] because I did feel like it helps, in some kind of non-metaphorical way, it helps me crystallize some of the things I've been thinking about metaphorically, I suppose.

. . . In many ways I didn't find it [the experience of sharing his story] a whole lot different than what I've kind of been doing in the last say four or five years through writing stories. In order to write the stories, I found it necessary for me to kind of review how I got up to the point of war, what happened in the war itself and what I felt I did afterwards. Although all that doesn't appear in the stories, it kind of becomes the frame that surrounds the picture. So I found it kind of necessary to do that, at least initially, just so I could set my perspective.

The only thing that I found that. . . became intriguing. . . . was the early stuff we were talking about, [the first interview focusing on] your life up to Vietnam. [I saw] more clearly some of the parallels between the civil rights stuff and some of the issues concerning Vietnam. Also, in reading back the transcript. . . [I found] some parallels between the way I did things when I came back from Vietnam--in having talked to my father and venting--. . . and the way he did things. There were some fairly amazing parallels in terms of that. I hadn't really thought about the parallels before. That was probably very helpful, just in terms of re-establishing for myself that things don't really change that much. People do tend to repeat patterns they learned in childhood and stuff like that. . . . I thought that [it] was interesting to see [the] kind of "like father, like son" type things.

. . . All of my writing springs from something that reinforced or said [the following:] "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?" I think that "see" is the key word in that sentence. There's something about

putting things down on paper then reading it afterwards, that's just *different* from thinking about it or even talking about it with somebody else. [This is] because it makes it stick more in some ways. It's not like it's cast in stone; it's just somehow more objectified in the process of doing it. It somehow becomes more solid in some ways.

. . . I think this has been very, a lot of fun to do, and I really mean that. I mean it's been entertaining in the sense of fun for myself. It's helped me to get a new perspective on our perspectives. It's given me kind of a focus for what I want to try to work on more in terms of that emotional flatness stuff. I think to the extent that anytime somebody else questions you about your own experience, particularly when those questions start leading into the general kinds of things from the specific, that's good.

I think sometimes, even if you tend to be one who questions yourself, you tend to start asking the same questions over and over; whereas, somebody else might ask you a different question which takes you off on a different direction. That's been good. That part of the thing has been very helpful.

Tim characterized his participation as an experience that fostered new awareness, connections and perspective. He was able to relate to experience in unique and creative ways as he generated novel perspectives from it. Much of this novelty in his thought was reinforced as he read what he had said, believing that seeing his own words was beneficial. Reading his transcripts had the effect of "crystallizing" and "objectifying" aspects of his life that were previously abstract, elusive or unacknowledged. For instance, he recognized "amazing" parallels between his work in the civil rights movement and his participation in Vietnam, and between how he and his father coped after returning from war. Tim was struck at his history of "emotional flatness," confronting this theme as manifested in his life, and purposing to work on changing it.

This was also the first time he had told his story in chronological order which he found to be helpful. He felt that being asked questions about his experience, especially questions that began general and become more focused as he shared and elaborated his

responses, was beneficial to him. He gave attention to parts of his life that had previously gone unrecognized.

Glen. Glen found similarities between giving interviews and reading transcripts and his own writing experience. He shared his progression from being very concerned about saying "the right things" in the first interview to being very comfortable, spontaneous and authentic in the last interview. He describes his experience participating in the interviews in the follow ways:

> . . . [This talk was] fine. In fact, I felt better as we got into it. It was kind of . . . structured [and] strenuous at first. I didn't know what you wanted. I don't think you were getting what you wanted out of me, which bothered me a little bit. But hey, like you said, it's my story, I'm going to tell it. I don't know exactly [when the turning point occurred]; [I] just seemed to click into it. And that seems to be the way it's happened in the past. The more I talk about it, the easier it becomes to talk about it.
>
> . . . The progression of what has gone on from the first one [interview], and of me trying to recall things in my life to tell you, to explain to you . . .has been an eye-opening experience for me. . . . In trying to explain to you, I hear what's been said. In doing that, [I hear] those things that I have missed over the years and over time--things I should have done, and the heartstrings say "whoops, don't forget this one now." It's been good. It is a freeing process allowing more freedom from the chains of where I was. And it's good to know that there are people out there that care.
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> . . . When I came here the first time, I wanted to give you what would help you to help other vets. That was my point. Now in doing that, I was restricting myself. . . . I was constantly thinking along those lines, [like], "This doesn't sound right. He might think this is crazy." So I would either change it, dilute it, or disregard it, and tell you something else. Well that's wrong. That's lying to you, specifically from the standpoint you wanted to do this for that open reason, and I wanted to come out and be honest. Well I can't be honest with anybody if I am holding things back, that, I honestly feel.

. . . For one thing, I've come to trust you. And another [thing is] I don't care. You've asked me a question; this is what I feel. This is the way it was, this is the way I see it as it was, this is what happened, period. . . That's freeing. That's honesty. I don't have to worry about , "Is he going to think this is nuts?" If you do, you do; that's your problem. I don't want you to get the impression there's an arrogance involved in there because I do not want to appear arrogant. That's not good manners. But it's freeing, and frankly, if you can't deal with that, tough. Now that's arrogance!

. . . This has been, I think, the best one of the sessions. I have obviously been far more relaxed. I feel far more relaxed with you now. I feel relaxed . . . in the fact that I don't have to worry about what I'm saying. Yes, I do care that it's relatively precise; but for the questions you've asked me, I've tried to be as honest and forthcoming as I possibly can. If it goes down on the tape wrongly, I can't help that. If somebody hears it as something else, I can't help that. . . . This was the best session, and I've enjoyed it thoroughly. There's a freeing process in open honesty that I hope has come across here. I hope that you've enjoyed it, and I hope that you've learned something from it, or at least that you gleaned what you need to, to have put it that way. I hope it's helped.

. . . It has been an interesting eye-opening experience for me because I came into the interviews wanting to give you what I thought you wanted, not what I was perhaps feeling. Therefore, it was structured and rigid. But at the last interview, I was relaxed. I learned things in speaking with you. It's been good. It's freeing. . . . It changed a lot of the way I was feeling about a lot of the "interviewing-type processes" that I've gone into because they've been over-structured in the past. Certain things have been wanted, and that's pretty much [like how] the first interview [went], as I said before. I came in wanting to deliver *this* which was not, honestly, of me. [It was similar to] the same type facts you read in a book, [and] not my heart-felt comments, you might say. [Telling my story was] interesting, surprising, and humiliating at times. I would just have to say it's a growing process. I've learned a lot about the inner feelings that have been contained and shut-down so long, much as I did when I was writing that book.

. . . The comments we made [in our previous meeting] with regards to the book I'm writing and how that issue was the primary catalyst in bringing things out in the open [stood out for me in reading my transcript].

It allowed me to put on paper what I could not say. I was disassociated with that enough that I could get by with it. But in reading it, it still hurt, but I could still get through it. It was an interesting process. . . . [Reading my transcripts] was freeing from the standpoint of personal worth, you might say, as it was when . . . I had found an outline that I had written in Miami in 1977.

. . . Outside of that, it's just been a freeing process. [It's been] helpful since I have been reluctant to go see people because for . . . how could they know [what it is like]. What do they know? Book knowledge? This is not it. I understand that. But in talking in this program it got out all the garbage that I've been hiding. And writing the book, that was the, I guess, the starting process. In trying to write that book it brought out the garbage that I had been suppressing for so long, refusing to admit it was there or even know it was there. But as various instances came out [as I wrote], [and] the more I cried, the more freeing it became. So, I would say this has been good.

. . . The impact from the standpoint of how it has come about in our discussions is a tighter focusing of those issues. I think, as I said, the book was perhaps a broad spectrum approach to just get the garbage totally out to where I could exist once again with myself. Then going over what we've gone over here, and your pointed questions, has brought out specifics I can think of and relate to.

. . . It's a growing process. It's been a very helpful process, and I wished I'd done it 20 years ago; I wouldn't have lost 20 years. The whole conception, [or] idea, of what I was like prior to Vietnam itself, immediately post-Vietnam, and now this--what I perceived is going to happen from here on in--and looking back as looking back, *not* being caught in the quagmire I've been in from the last 20 plus years, it has been very good.

. . . .It has [been important] because, particularly for me since I've lost my memory, having the transcripts [allows me to] look back and see things. That triggers the memory again, so I can go back and relate to it. It's considerably helpful, much so.

. . . Because of what you said in the question, I don't know what the next question is going to be, but I'm thinking; and then the question comes out. Now, I might think of something that is not directly related to that question, but it comes out as being important to me . . . and . . . that

would be something to key in on. Eventually, I'll get around to your question, but it might take a while. But in that while, I'll be spilling out all this other stuff that has come to the surface.

That's the problem I think . . . the social help organizations and persons have totally missed. The guys want help, but they have to be forced sometimes because . . .they're hiding. Most of these guys have had 20 to 25 years experience in hiding, so it's tough. The interrogator literally has to know what the hell he or she's doing to get them because they've had so much experience. . . [using] the structured approach. [The structured interview format] has been given to the interviewer in their classes or whatever else instruction [they've received]. Then they're passing that sort of thing on to the veteran, and the veteran is a perfect chameleon [in such a context]. Nobody's helped. If it were that way now, you wouldn't be helped, *I* wouldn't be helped. We'd both walk away with smiles, but they'd be false smiles; and in reality, I'd get what I'd want, which was [to get] out of here without crying or dealing with the problem. You'd get what you want, which was a session with the veteran.

It takes time to sink into the depths of the animal you become in war. It's a process that the mind does not realize [has ended]. . . and it plays it all back and dumps it into [your consciousness] so unless. . . the interviewers know how to deal with this in reality and understand it for reality--not for what the book says--we're going to have screwed up people forever. That's why I think this [the interview process] is a very very good idea because it's brought me to a clearer understanding of the problems that I was facing just trying to get this out to help some other veteran. Once the problems came up in our discussion, I was faced with the fact, you've got to deal with these. Fortunately I was already enough out, that I couldn't turn around and suppress it and say, "We'll forget about this." No, you can't forget. I know what it was like when I forgot about it and suppressed it. I don't want that anymore. Now we'll deal with this. So this has been extremely good for me. I've learned a lot, thank you.

. . . In dealing with this, it's going to be interesting from my standpoint to see how they [the other veterans] looked at it. For me, it's been a very very good opening process. Not only for the hope of me telling you something to help you or the veterans, but it's been fantastic for me. I've learned so damn much about myself, it's surprising.

> . . . There's no sense in stopping all this. . . . I don't want to stop this. This is becoming. . . a real enjoyable process. I was actually looking forward to doing this interview because it's helping me more than it will ever help you, I think.

Glen began the interviews concerned about whether he was giving the correct information, doubting that he was meeting the interviewer's needs. As the interviews progressed, he began to tell "his" story in an honest and authentic way, unencumbered by interviewer expectations. He began to experience trust toward the interviewer and toward his ability to narrate his experience spontaneously. He commented on how the interview's emphasis was on following *his* lead, to solicit *his* story any way he chose to share it, and that approach was different and valuable. Prior attempts to tell his story were met with a pre-formed structure; the interviewer had an agenda that Glen was expected to meet. He found these highly structured types of interviews easy to "hide" within, giving the interviewer what he or she wanted, but being a "chameleon" in the process. In this research, he found there was no place or reason to "hide." Since it felt safe, there was trust and *he* determined what was emphasized, he was candid and looked to his own experience as a reference. The result was a freeing sensation, as if he were liberated from something restrictive and binding (e.g., "the chains of where I was").

The interview experience was described as "eye-opening," revealing to Glen "things that I've missed over the years" and "things I should have done." He explains that looking back over the past twenty years has been a learning process. He has learned to be honest with himself and with others. He has learned to accept and face his responsibilities, something he refers to as "being a man." He explained that the learning from the interviews has been "interesting," "surprising" and "humiliating."

He was reminded about how his feelings have been contained, how he "shuts down" his emotional world for many years. This process, along with writing his book, have enabled him to confront this trauma and feel his emotions. The interviews gave him a

"tighter focus" on the broad issues that writing his book created. He felt that looking at Vietnam in the context of his life was very beneficial in that it fostered "growth". He dealt with whatever the interviews "brought up" for him, not allowing himself to avoid painful issues.

Transcribing the interviews was helpful in another sense. Since Glen has memory impairment from his head wounds in Vietnam, he tended to forget some of the things he said in the meetings. By reading his transcripts, he would have access to what he said without impairment from his memory.

He feels that this process has helped him more so than it will benefit the research, calling it an "extremely good" experience for him.

Summation. All participants found their experience of participating in this research profitable. For some, it was the first time they had ever shared parts (or all) of their story. None of the participants had shared his experience in the context of pre-Vietnam, Vietnam and post-Vietnam; all found this to be an insightful learning process. All participants believed that reading their transcripts was an important element in the research that had many positive benefits (i.e., taking their experience more seriously, crystallizing understanding, gaining different perspectives, making connections between life events, etc.). Most conveyed regret for not participating in this interview process twenty years prior, believing that it may have spared them from painful experiences and problems that occurred since their return home.

The Subjective Experience of Living with the Vietnam Trauma and its Lingering Sequelae

The subjective experience of living with Vietnam is multifaceted and idiosyncratic in nature. This section attempts to elucidate some of the facets that represent the veterans' subjective experience of life post-Vietnam. These facets, or themes, will rely on supporting quotations to explain each theme. The themes were chosen due to the high frequently of occurrence across the interviews. A brief summarizing label will designate each theme, in

some cases, acting to group together several common themes. Since many of the quotations span several themes the follow labeling of topics must be seen as arbitrary.

In an attempt to manage the length of this section, each theme will be summarized. A full account in the veterans' words that corresponds to each theme can be found elsewhere (Appendix D). The following themes convey with clarity and detail what the inner experience of post-war life has been like for the veterans.

Debt to Be Paid. Andrew experiences the feeling that something is required of him, that debt must be paid. This feeling of debt is necessary to reestablish a sense of justice, to make things "right" in the larger moral sense. His trauma of unintentionally killing a child fostered a sense that his children may be taken in retribution for the girl's life. When his children faced life difficulties, he felt a haunting sense of guilt stemming from the possibility that the difficulties were compensatory in nature. A sense of vigilance surrounded his paternal attempts to protect his daughters and thwart off retaliation.

Another sense of debt felt by both Andrew and Glen is toward those soldiers that died in the war. They state that one important motivation for them seeking help is to seek help in the name of the deceased, to honor their lives (and sacrifice) by making the most of their own lives. A related aspect of this debt is that of defending the honor of those who perished by not allowing any form of desecration in the social sphere (i.e., dialogue, media, politics). Further elaboration on their strongly felt obligation to uphold with dignity the memory of the deceased is found below under the theme of survivor guilt.

Changes in Life Due to Vietnam. There is consensus among all four veterans: Vietnam was a pivotal and life changing event for them. Some of the changes in their lives are positive, such as seeing Vietnam as a rite of passage, generating an appreciation for life, and learning many insights about life that few are keenly aware of and can grasp. Most of the changes, however, are seen as detrimental or negative such as: having to live with high levels of pain and confusion, unintentionally hurting loved ones, premature aging and loss of innocence, intense exposure to death, preoccupation with Vietnam (i.e., having the

memories, images and affect color one's perspective on many issues), confusion over one's identity and shutting down emotionally. Much of this research explores the changes encountered from exposure to war. Vietnam definitively changed these men.

No Explicit Symptomatology of PTSD for a Period of Time After Vietnam. All of the veterans had long periods of time (several years) where they were not overtly affected by Vietnam. Each expended effort to be *un*-affected by the war. In retrospect, most could see signs that issues were lurking close at hand yet found ways to avoid them, even when the issues were broached (i.e., Tim had a counselor bring up the subject of Vietnam yet he took ten years to finally accept it). Some were in complete denial of the fact that Vietnam was affecting them.

It is difficult to fully understand why the veterans experienced a duration of time where they were relatively free--at least overtly--from the effects of war trauma. Andrew went directly to work at a funeral home upon returning and may have been "death immersed" (postponing his confrontation with Vietnam). Glen went in the CIA, which is a para-military organization. Ernie remained in the military for several years after Vietnam. These individual factors may have acted to buffer each of them against facing traumatic issues due to the extension of military-related attributes and/or themes in each of their respective post-war environments.

Reticence Toward Discussing Vietnam With Others. All the veterans discussed instances of either refusing to talk about Vietnam and/or talking about it yet regretting having done so. Andrew expressed concern that if he did enter into discuss about Vietnam and the conversant criticized him or soldiers in general, he would respond violently, hurting the person. Glen, incidentally, actually did attack a professor that spoke critically of veterans that had lost their lives. Andrew and Tim pointed out there were not places to talk about Vietnam in our society without the risk of being misunderstood or silenced, or unnecessarily burdening family members or others with trauma imagery.

Tim did not have close relationships in the city he moved to after Vietnam, so he did not have a chance to disclose to others. He feared being misunderstood by those who had not been in Vietnam--therefore lacked understanding. He also did not want to be characterized as a "crazy Vietnam veteran." Tim did have some conversations with his former father-in-law but realized that the father-in-law was more interested in debating abstract issues than in understanding his experience.

Feeling Important and Powerful in Vietnam and the Transition Back to Civilian Life. In Vietnam one has the ultimate power: to choose who lives and dies. Andrew describes the "awesome power" and the importance of one's decisions or presence to those in one's unit which characterized his military experience. This importance instantly changed when he returned to civilian life. It was a "let down" being a "regular" person again after the war was over. He grew accustomed to the high-risk climate of Vietnam which he missed once he left.

Glen was a platoon leader and made decisions on a daily basis about the welfare of his platoon and the individuals that comprised it. As a result of his injuries, he was restricted to bed with the possibility of paralysis. Once he recovered, he concealed his Vietnam experience from others, taking the role of chameleon.

Ernie had top-secret clearance for radio communications. His position was extremely valuable for was responsible for deciphering communication. Accurate communication and detection of the Vietnamese communication saved lives. When his unit was busted for drugs, he was stripped of his high-level clearance. It took him years of hard work to regain some sense of pride in, and self-respect from, his MOS in the military. And even when he worked his way up through the ranks again, it was lost instantly when charges were brought against him for allegedly being AWOL.

Tim had the power to save lives (both American and Vietnamese) and improve the quality of life for many orphans. He found a sense of power in helping. An unforeseen twist of fate resulted in many of the orphans dying because of their association with the

American veterans. Another incident involved Tim helping to save a small child's life just prior to leaving Vietnam and returning home. Upon entering the US, he was asked how many babies he burned today. Tim's main goal upon returning home was assimilation; he wanted to be a "solid citizen."

For all of these men, Vietnam represented varying degrees of power. How power manifested itself differed from the ability to take life (of the enemy) to the ability to save life. Each experienced a loss of power upon leaving Vietnam.

Effects Upon Family. Each veteran discussed the impact of Vietnam on his family. Vietnam has had a negative impact on relationships with family members in all cases. Two failed marriages and trouble with a current engagement (producing fear of destroying it) prompted Ernie to face Vietnam. Andrew is adamant that his family is to be protected from Vietnam-related material in spite of his desire that his wife understand it. Glen began to seriously look into himself when he saw how he acted with his children, treating them as if they were marines. He also has had two failed marriages, at least one failed marriage was directly due to his inability to express himself, show feelings, tenderness or love. He was not able to be vulnerable in front of his wife, fearing she would see inside him and be repulsed or see duplicity (i.e., what he refers to as his chameleon-like behavior). Tim has had two failed marriages. Tim struggles with a sense of detachment from those close to him. He has learned that "people go away" and seems to keep a safe distance from others.

Staying *In* Relationship to Vietnam. Andrew and Tim agree that one's relationship to Vietnam needs to be current and ongoing. The veterans have each oscillated at different points in their lives between efforts to disavow Vietnam and being overwhelmed and preoccupied by it. How one stays in a healthy relationship with their traumatic experience is an individual matter, but one worth resolving. Two things seem clear. First, denying that Vietnam is an issue when it really is does not succeed. Second, relating to the war experience needs to be a *part* of one's life, not all of it.

Nightmares, Flashbacks and Intrusive Imagery. Except for Ernie, all of the veterans have had distressed nightmares and/or intrusive imagery of Vietnam. Andrew's nightmares of the little girl became so frequent and intense that he would avoid sleep in order to avoid the nightmare. At one point in his life, he did not ". . . know where the dream starts and ends and where my life starts and ends." He now resigns himself to the fact that he is going to have nightmares at times.

Tim's experience was similar to Andrew's in that he had vivid imagery about his friend Mick, the muzzle flashes and the soldier with the picture of his family. He refers to them as "snapshots" and has been able to transform them from "frozen" images to more protean-like imagery.

Glen has nightmares (evidenced by distressed others who overhear him in his sleep) but does not recall them. He believes his subconscious closes itself off from his consciousness; thus, only dreams can access his subconscious trauma imagery.

None of the veterans have found ways to stop the nightmares. Andrew resigns himself to having nightmares when he states how he is just "tagged" with them. There is one change: they understand the *context* of the nightmares now, which is relief in itself. In other words, they know what is symbolized in the nightmare. They can recall the traumatic scene(s) and admit it into their waking consciousness so that they can address it. They have worked on the trauma imagery in therapy--and in other ways--to obtain healing and resolution.

Trauma Stimuli; Lingering Effects of War. Each veteran exhibits distinctive trauma stimuli behavior. Andrew mentions recognizing the unique sound of UH1B helicopter (the hum of the blades due to their pitch) and never driving the same routes when he travels. Ernie discusses certain noises that sound like gun or mortar rounds. He also mentions images that solicit an automatic response, like the child with the toy gun. Glen estimates sixty percent of his attention is preoccupied with Vietnam. This preoccupation may manifest itself by sitting in the corner tables of restaurants scanning the environment for

signs of danger or while walking in woods with his girlfriend. On the day of the fifth interview, Tim shared how his wife suddenly sneezed near him while his back was toward her. He reflexively fell to the ground even though he was in the safety of his own house. Several of the vets shared how they routinely walk through their house in the dark looking for unlocked windows and signs of intruder entry.

Avoidance of Feelings; Tendency to Stay "Numb" Emotionally. Psychic numbing, the tendency to *not* feel and avoid issues that would promote affect, is a ubiquitous symptom following traumatization. Glen explains one of the main causes of it. In combat, one has to do what he was trained to do without the interfering effects of emotions (with the exception of anger which can often assist the soldier). Emotions had to be separated from "doing your job." Often, awareness is limited to the intellectual realms, and attempts to integrate the corresponding emotions are avoided. It can seem overwhelming to begin feeling after so much experience has been "stuffed so deep inside." This means that remembering has to be limited only to memories that will not reactivate emotional responses or can be separated from the affective components.

For Glen, to be "human" meant that he had to feel. He believes it requires "a hell of a man to be a man" and feel the pain. He did not begin allowing himself to feel until three years ago. As Tim explains, resolution of traumatic experience requires coming to terms with *both* the intellectual and emotional aspects, or else one is stunted. Ernie used alcohol to numb his feelings. Andrew was able to avoid his affect for years, but once he did begin to feel, it devastated him for a period of years and led to the need for hospitalizations.

Feeling As If There Are Different "Parts" to One's Experience. Glen and Tim are candid in elucidating how there are different "parts" to their personality, or, their way of experiencing. They refer to these parts as: "two people inside of me, the conscious and the subconscious," "multiple personalities," "lying to myself, and I got caught by myself," "being a "chameleon," the "fly-on-the-wall" part of oneself and "there's kind of two 'mes' at the same time." These parts seem to be divided along the lines of feeling. There are those

parts that have emotion and are in the moment, in the experience with openness to affective expression. Then there are other parts that are detached and removed from direct experience, but that rely on intellectual perspective. These different parts are capable of being in conflict.

Glen describes how he is beginning to integrate these parts of him, to "mold" them into one. This has not always been the case for him. His children were important in helping him to look honestly at himself. He describes how he began observing different parts of himself. A part of him was trying desperately to look normal, fit in, please others; this was the "chameleon" part he refers to. He was not being candid with what he really felt which was intense anger that he protected others from seeing. Others saw the "functional level" that exhibited no problems; yet, on another level, he was "a bundle of emotion about to explode". For twenty years, he pretended that the angry self did not really exist. The love and forgiveness of his children seemed to confront him in an innocent yet irrefutable way.

Tim explains, ". . . that a lot of my life is done with smoke and mirrors in the sense that I constantly feel as if I'm a fly on the wall watching myself live. There's kind of two 'mes' at the same time." He describes how one 'me' is involved in the experience while the other 'me' is observing his participation from a distance, like a fly on the wall. He reflects how he continuously sees life from multiple perspectives. This observing self was significantly strengthened in Vietnam possibly to retain his sanity in light of what he saw and experienced. He strives to keep a balance between participating in experience and observing experience from afar, but often cannot participate as much as he would like. In other words, the fly-on-the-wall part of him is stronger than the part that can immerse itself in the experience. He regrets not feeling more close to his family, participating in the experience of being connected with them.

Opposite Ends of the Spectrum; The Best and the Worst, Life and Death. Andrew expresses the camaraderie he enjoyed (and misses) with those in his unit, the importance he felt in that context; yet, these strong and desirable feelings existed in the context of a brutal

war. Tim shares how he comforts a Black soldier who awakens to find much of his body missing, and in agony, dies; yet, he witnesses the successful struggle for life of a little Vietnamese girl, participating in her healing miracle. Tim also described how he and some soldiers helped a local orphanage only to later realize that the orphanage was savagely attacked specifically due to their efforts to get involved and help in the first place.

Glen articulates how the Vietnam experience brought together opposite ends of the spectrum; light and darkness, life and death. In Vietnam, ". . . you have the absolute best and the absolute worst of life in any one spot at one period of time." Glen believes this is almost impossible for the average citizen to understand. There is a thrill, a sense of victory, in facing death and somehow surviving the encounter. Many civilians do not understand the intensely positive experiences the veterans did in fact have in war. Some of these experience might include the thrill of having survived, the intense camaraderie and trust between those who served together, the triumph of the human spirit against all odds, and the recognition that comes with having saved lives.

Survivor Guilt; Bringing Honor to Those Who Never Returned. Glen lives to honor those who lost their life in Vietnam. He believes one way he can honor them is ". . . doing the best I can with what time I have left." For many years, he was angry he was left alive, wishing he had joined those who had died. He believed many died who had more to offer society than he; it did not make sense that he lived and they were killed. He holds the deceased in high esteem for their ultimate sacrifice. He has to live with the responsibility he had of sending young men out into battle, knowing many would not ever return. He has made significant progress toward making peace with this responsibility, seeing how it was a heavy burden for a young man to shoulder.

Andrew is outspoken about maintaining the dignity and honor of those who died in Vietnam. He dreads the day that he hears someone dishonor their memory, fearing his impulse to lash out in rage and violence. At one time, he was very involved with POW/MIA issues and did not want to forget anyone who might have been left behind.

Shame Over Feelings of Not Doing "Enough" in Vietnam. Both Ernie and Tim were apprehensive about the fifth interview (the joint interview). They feared how they might be perceived by Andrew and Glen, since Andrew and Glen had extensive time in direct combat operations. Incidentally, only support and validation was given to Ernie and Tim in the fifth interview. Andrew made it clear that everyone was at constant risk of attack and danger. Exposure to this death-immersed environment was significant in and of itself.

Ernie shared, for the first time, his feeling of being "less" of a soldier for not being actively involved in combat. He found it to be "refreshing" to admit this, stating it ". . . took a load off me."

The Complicated Task of Healing. Glen describes the "human animal" as a "disgustingly complicated thing." He insists that the process of change resulting from going to Vietnam is important to understand; it is especially important to understand how the mind becomes "dissociated." One is operating on training and experience--as a machine--to get the job done. So ". . . everything your conscious mind is doing is in the third person." However, even though one's attention is focused on the situation at hand, one's mind is "recording it all." Then, upon returning to civilian life, the mind starts to play it back all at once, and one has to decide how he will deal with this material. The mind does not realize that one is no longer in war. It continues to operate and "dump" into one's consciousness. This process is difficult to understanding, but Glen believes that understanding it is necessary for counselors who wish to be helpful.

Andrew found that he never thought about what his needs were, or what he needed to do to maintain his psychological health when he returned from Vietnam. He just became extremely busy and avoided introspection. He was not able to sort out what was healthy for him and what was unhealthy; he did what he pleased. He believed there was no place in his life that needed a "Band-Aid."

Sense of Loss, Detachment and Alienation. Andrew spent a year on his unheated boat, without socializing, prior to going to the hospital. Glen shared that after some time

passed while in Vietnam, he did not even want to learn the names of new soldiers assigned to his platoon, for they could be killed so quickly it was less painful to *not* know them. Tim has spent much of his life feeling detached from others. His relationship motto is: "People go away." Since returning from Vietnam, he's always experienced a sense of separateness. He hypothesizes that this distance from others is likely a self-protective measure that applies even to his own family. He uses the illustrative metaphor of individuals in cages who can, at best, reach out from their cages, but will always remain in a cage. Elsewhere in his interviews, he regrets that he is so detached and wishes he could get back to how he was prior to Vietnam.

Efforts to Assimilate Back into Society. All tried to reintegrate into society *prior* to facing their traumatic experience; no one was successful. Andrew went directly to work for his father, Glen--upon healing--went into the CIA (with a brief period of studying law) and Ernie remained in the military for years before reentering civilian life..

Tim, following in the footsteps of his W.W. II father, tried very hard to be a "solid citizen." Upon returning home, he quickly worked to secure a wife, job, home and dog--all the "normal-citizen-type" possessions and rituals. The trouble was that he did not completely fit the mold he had in his mind. He found these solid citizen pursuits empty and lacking in fulfillment. He felt like he was living a "double life," blotting things out with the help of alcohol and long walks in the woods. Despite his best efforts to forget Vietnam and be a solid citizen, he felt a constant and haunting need to deal with Vietnam.

Difficulty Handling Frustration and Anger. There is often a tendency to overreact in response to a perceived threat, especially when either frustration, irritation or anger have been provoked. Anger reactions can become very intense, very quickly. Andrew mentioned verbally confronting everyone in his family and later feeling terrible about it. Glen stated that when angered or provoked, his initial response is to reach for his weapon. Ernie, in a state of rage, once attempted to skin a man with a knife when upset. All of the veterans find

themselves walking away from situations because they fear their own anger responses and from what they are capable of doing.

Tim describes a part of him that wants to "search and destroy" when he becomes angry. He has to be careful to hold himself in check. Participating in this project seemed to lower his tolerance for frustration which has the potential for lashing out verbally against people. He knew that he needed to exercise care, cognizant of the difficult and emotional work he is investing in this research.

The Degree to Which They Have Integrated and/or Made Sense of Vietnam in the Context of Their Lives

The interviews seek to understand the effects of Vietnam in the context of the veteran's life. One area of interest concerns the extent to which the veteran feels he has made sense of Vietnam and integrated it into his life. Below are summarizations taken from quotations from each veteran that respond to the issue of integrating Vietnam into one's life. The actual words of the veterans are contained elsewhere (Appendix E).

Andrew. Andrew explains that he has made sense of Vietnam, an irrational experience, in the best way that he can. He still works on keeping a healthy relationship to it. He has the peace that comes from conviction that much of what he did in Vietnam was "right," and if placed in the same situation, he would do most of it the same way. He believes he has grown and changed in healing from Vietnam and changed unhealthy behaviors from his past. He credits his family and their support for much of his change and recovery. He also credits the fact that he has entered into a relationship with Vietnam so that it is *part* of his life and not an engulfing preoccupation he dwells on. He accepts that there are some aspects of his experience he will have to continually deal with. He maintains his psychological health and resilience by meeting with his therapist. He knows that it's unhealthy to discuss his trauma with his family.

Glen. Glen feels he has made peace with Vietnam. He takes pride in the fact that even his friends notice a difference. Now that he has survived the experience and done

much healing in relation to it, he sees value in all that he has learned. In fact, he has grown to respect and appreciate the learning process. He stated a few times in the interviews that he would not want to go through it again, however, he values the learning his experience has taught him so much that if offered a millions dollars to part with it, he would decline. To go back to his adolescence and relive it with what he now knows, he would try to prevent the war in the first place. He can now enjoy life. He believes that he had to go through all he went through to get to where he is today, enjoying life.

He believes that God, "The Supreme Commander" decided his life would continue. At first, he disliked the decision but now sees it as a gift. He cannot change history but he can change himself. He can live his life with dignity and in so doing bring honor to those who died. At this point in his life, he is ready to die or live, the later took twenty years to learn.

Tim. Tim thinks that he has integrated his Vietnam experience into his life; even though it is sixteen years after the fact. He owes a great deal to his writing, which sharpened his perspective on his identity and what his involvement in the war meant. His effort to make sense of Vietnam was to recreate it, to dredge up substrate and examine it through the lenses of multiple perspectives. He believes humans are protean and sees his understanding as continually re-evolving and changing with new experience. Although it is possible to "re-wire the circuit board" without having made sense of the experience, it is not advisable. He has done the work required to make sense of his experience. He is still affected by Vietnam (i.e., his detachment from others because they will "go away") but understands it better and continues to work on it.

Ernie. Ernie has found help and healing in his life through Alcoholics Anonymous (and the Twelve Step Program) and religion. With these two influences, he can live in the present and let the past be the past. He can make amends to himself and to those he has wronged. He has used this research to tell his story and witness it, a requirement for Step

Four. He feels good about the telling of his story. He believes he has control in his life today.

Summarization. All the veterans have found some meaning and achieved some degree of integration in relation to their war experience. All have taken many years to sort out the meaning of this experience in their lives. All advocate the need to come to terms with the war experience, each feeling relief and benefit from doing so. The journeys that brought them to this place of understanding are found within their stories (Chapter 4).

What Fosters Hope, Well-being and a Sense of Future

The fourth interview asked the veterans to reflect on issues of hope, questions of how they maintain their sense of well-being and thoughts pertaining to the future. The information gathered is provided below in their own words.

Andrew. Andrew had these things to say about what fosters hope, well-being and a sense of future for him:

> . . . So, as of right now, I'm optimistic. I spend as much time as I can on the ocean, commercial fishing [and] doing things that will allow me to enjoy what I want to do and give me peace.
>
> . . . I want more of a future. I've been plagued with this thing, and I don't know where it comes from. I've been talked to by the psychologists about it. It's like . . . I have a short future, . . . and I'm not terminally [ill], . . . I'm not suicidal, and I'm not depressed about anything right now--I just, I don't know. It's almost like I live for the immediate future. I don't want to plan too far ahead. . . . I've been dealing in the last five years with the *immediate* future--more than one day at a time, but certainly less than a year.
>
> . . . But my plan is to do the fishing myself, rather than entertain people, and I mean take them out [fishing] for a fee. And I find that the minute I committed myself to that, I've got a whole crew of people coming out of the wood-work wanting to do it with me. . . . I think I'm good at it, it's what I love to do. I do commercial skin diving work, and I'm going to continue doing that. So there's something for me to do every day, which is all important.

> And that's it. [I] just take care of those things I should and find whatever good time I can. Life isn't fair. Anyone who tells you it's fair hasn't got a real good look at it. Just do the best you can, find what you enjoy and squirrel out whatever enjoyment you can. Drive on. If you're looking for things to be fair, you're in the wrong place. You're heading for a fall if you are looking for life to be all roses, buddy.
>
> . . . I think that for Vietnam veterans . . . their main help is going to be always with the Veterans Administration. If the Veterans Administration could have programs where they take [the] time [needed] and don't wait ten years until someone comes in, [they would be more effective]. [They should] screen people and see if they can get them to talk about it [the war]. I don't know how to do that. I'm only saying that I think . . . it's a shame to let the problem go.
>
> But a lot of it is society; society allows and makes a place for people to talk about their experiences. They [one's trauma experiences] are going to be less important to them. That's not the right word. They're going to be less *destructive* to them. It think *that's* it, right there. There are some people who care who are willing to listen and dig deep enough to take the cover off and help people through.

Andrew's plans are to be on or in the ocean fishing or diving. He purposes to do things that bring him enjoyment and to stay active. He aims to meet his needs rather than give preference to the needs of others. He is plagued by a foreshortened sense of future and knows it is common with those who have experienced severe trauma; he still seeks relief and hopes to someday have a sense of future. He warns others about a truth he learned: "life is not fair." He watches himself closely so that he does not subconsciously begin to demand that life be fair, which would only upset him. He holds out hope that the VA can change. He thinks the VA should take a more proactive stance in helping veterans affected by combat. He also hopes that the VA will take the time to truly listen to the veteran. He looks for ". . . people who care and are willing to listen and dig deep enough to take the cover off and help people through."

Glen. Glen had these things to say about what fosters hope, well-being and a sense of future for him:

> . . . [To maintain my psychological health and well being] . . . I just deal with life one day at a time, remembering where I came from, where I was, and those few people that helped me along the lines to where I am now. . . . I realize that tomorrow is going to be an exceptional day in the fact that I will learn something else new. . . . That's the best way that I can express it. Life's a learning process. I stopped living for twenty years, so in a sense I'm enjoying those late adolescent early adult years I didn't get to back in the late '60's. That's the way I see it; pay back. I can say with all honesty a few of my acquaintances and friends are sorry as hell I'm feeling this way. They're dealing with a twenty-one year old crazy man sometimes. But that's the way I look at it. In order to maintain what I've got, I have to look at the future of what I think it should be [and] what I can do. I can't change the world. I have no desire to. I can't change the United States. I can't even change this state or this town; but I can change myself, and that's what I'm going to do.
>
> . . . [What brings the most fulfillment or hope to me is] the knowledge of where I've been, what I've done, whom I've been with, where I'm going and what I'm able to do--which is unlimited. I found that out because I'm still a kid, you understand? And of course I have my children, and I'm immensely proud of them. They consume the vast majority of my time, as far as my thoughts and efforts for them, because I want to provide them, obviously, with a betterment of what I had. I would love to provide them with a world that is at peace, but I can't. So I do the best I can.
>
> . . . Well, I have a future now I didn't have before. I feel good about it. I don't know where it's going to go or how I'm going to get there; but there's something out there, and I'm looking forward to it. The future that I am currently dealing with, of course, is my kids. I want to see them go well through school and college and things like that. I want to be able to help them deal with the issues of life I know they will be facing.
>
> I can better do that now because I'm not a chameleon. That in itself is a freeing process. I guess you'd say even though I've lost probably 20

> plus years of actual time of hiding from myself, that time can be compressed into something of use. Whatever I do is going to be done honestly; good, bad, or indifferent. I'll make an honest choice to do or not do something because I'm not playing the part for somebody else to do something. That's freeing in itself I don't know outside of that; at least I have a future now I didn't have before.

Glen finds fulfillment in ". . . the knowledge of where I've been, what I've done, whom I've been with, where I'm going and what I'm able to do--which is unlimited." He is open to learning and is excited about learning something new each day. He no longer tries to change things he cannot change (i.e., the Country) but redirects his energies to changing himself, one day at a time. He finds pride and his future in his children. At times, he feels like an overgrown adolescent. His hope is that he can give his children a world at peace but is doubtful whether this will ever be. He believes he has a future now. He feels good about having a future, a sentiment he did not always have. He feels he is living his life authentically, honestly and without hiding in roles. His future is *his* to live.

Tim. Tim had these things to say about what fosters hope, well-being and a sense of future for him:

> . . . Even though I may feel separate from people, and there's always a kind of psychological distance between me and other people, I just cherish life so much, even when it's bad, just because I can feel the air on my skin and that kind of thing. I know one of the things that's happened as a result of this, [is] that I've become more conscious of this in the last two or three years; I've probably become overly cautious. . . . I literally, in many cases, will count the steps downstairs in my house, each time I go down the stairs, because I want to know that my foot is on the stair. We have kind of a steep, narrow staircase, anyway, and I tend to stay up in the dark a lot. . . . [I don't want to fall] and hurt myself or kill myself, and bang my head on the newel post or something like that.
>
> I know that some of that has become almost kind of a bit of an obsession with me because I value life so much. On the other hand, I

smoke a pack of unfiltered camels a day, too. But let me elaborate upon that. People are always after me to stop smoking. . . . Quite honestly, smoking is a physical pleasure. I mean, there's just nothing like sitting down, especially with a beer or a cup of coffee or something like that, or after a meal, and lighting up--going through rituals of lighting a cigarette [and] tapping it. I smoke non-filtered cigarettes, tap it, tap the tobacco down . . . and drawing the smoke in your lungs and letting it out. . . I think, I know I'm not going to live forever, and I'll probably shorten my life by doing this. But goddamn it, I'm going to enjoy every fucking minute of it while I'm doing it in a very physical way, just because I can. I mean, I'm here to do it so [why not].

. . . I guess one of my mottoes--I finally learned this--is Socrates, "All things in moderation." So I take care not to go overboard on these things at this point in my life. . . . To go overboard kind of destroys the pleasure of the physical experience. I mean, when you're really zonked you don't really enjoy it that much. I do some things like that just to kind of heighten the awareness, I suppose.

. . . I remember it was one day that my daughter and I were sitting down in the front bench in the front yard. . . . She wants help with long-division, so she brought her paper and pencil out. I'm sitting there explaining to her how to do long-division, and I'm saying once you get past the decimal point, and I'm thinking to myself, "Point of no return. Unless the number is one that is going to end in an even, . . . you can extend it out forever." . . . That idea that once you get past the decimal point, if it's an irregular number--or whatever the phrase is--the fraction can just extend out forever. Somehow that's just like the enjoyment of life. I mean I know it's not going to go on forever, but it just keeps extending while it's going on.

I think she and I, in some kind of subconscious way, think alike, because she writes stories too. I think she tends to think in the same kind of metaphorical way I do. I just remembered when I said that we were looking at the paper and doing this, and we looked up and looked at each other; it was just like this look of recognition, like this means more than something about long-division. It was one of those moments and those things just--God, they're like soap bubbles. They're just so beautiful you'd love to be able to hang onto them, and you know you can't.

I feel like I have this appreciation of life in both the physical sense and what I would call a metaphorical sense. . . . Just keeping on. Just being able to continue to enjoy the moment for what it is and to just try to soak as much of that moment up as I can and get as much out of it as I can. . . . I'm not a thrill-seeker or anything like that. I mean, it doesn't have to be anything that puts me on any kind of edge in terms of heart pounding or anything like that. I don't even do much in the way of exercise or anything like that. It's just watching those soap bubbles.

. . . My oldest daughter who's a junior in college will graduate, and maybe she'll go to graduate school. Certainly she'll probably move away. Maybe she'll get married. Maybe she'll have kids. She probably won't understand me any better than she does now, for at least another five or ten years. Maybe at that point she'll begin to understand who I was during her childhood a little more. Maybe that will lead her to keep concerned about establishing a better relationship with me than the two of us enjoy together right now. My youngest daughter probably wound up being closer to me than my oldest daughter, if for no other reason than that she's had the fly on the wall perspective of seeing what's happening with her older sister and me. She is not as tolerant of her older sister's point of view, in part because she sees how it affects me. My wife will keep on keeping on, trying to be the mediator between all of us.

I will probably continue to write. I know I'll continue to write. Some of that might be about Vietnam. Most of it, whether it's about Vietnam or not, will probably have to do with just how I see myself functioning in the world, trying to understand that better. [I'll also] see if there is some way I can improve it, where I feel it needs improving. . . . I'll just keep putting one foot in front of the other, breathing in and breathing out.

. . . I have no clue [about the length of my future]. I often think about suicide not in the sense that that's something I'm planning on doing right now, but it's the ultimate control over your own life. I think if I ever reach the point where life just doesn't seem to be worth living to me anymore, which would largely have to do with issues of physical health . . . I'd like to think that I'd have the courage to just blow myself away. I don't want to wind up being a burden to anyone else. I think a lot about death; I

know I tend to have a kind of dark side to my psyche. Sometimes it surfaces in things like gallows humor.

Tim strongly affirms life in its many manifestations each day. He cherishes life--even on bad days--just because he's alive to have bad days. He is tuned into his senses, noticing subtleties of life, such as the sensation of air on his skin. He takes great pleasure in physical pleasures such as smoking, never taking the pleasures for granted (and never over-doing them either). He treasures moments of connection with others. He also finds pleasure in contemplating sublime realities and truths. He hopes to establish better relationships with his daughters in the future. He plans on continuing to write and explore himself. As to the length of future, he hesitated, as if the question confounded him. He seems to live in the moment without extensive efforts to anticipate or plan his future. He did remark that he insists upon a degree of quality to his life and that he never become burdensome to others.

Ernie. Ernie had these things to say about what fosters hope, well-being and a sense of future for him:

> . . . I know that I am forgiven, and I know that religion is very important in my life now. I had many fears throughout my life that are no longer important. . . . I know religion is big on that, but I never would have sought the support of God and the Lord Jesus Christ if I hadn't sought my sobriety. That's all part of the recovery and part of dealing with the experience. . . I could not have moved on . . . without my sobriety.
>
> . . . Anticipate for my future[?] In my community, I plan on remaining on the Planning Board. I do not plan on running for the present selectmen's position that I now set on. I plan on getting married again. I plan on buying the house that I'm presently living in.
>
> . . . I plan on continuing my sobriety. I have to for the rest of my life because I know that as long as I stay sober, my life will continue to be better. I know that I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever He wants me to go, that's where I'm going to go.

> As long as I feel comfortable in what I'm doing, I know that I'm going in the right direction. I feel very comfortable with many of the things that I'm presently doing in my life. . . . I know that in order for me to continue to recover, I have to help other people. . . . I know that I can help people within my community. I know that I can help people within this sphere; I know that I can help people within my AA sphere, my home group. I know when I need a meeting, I go. I know when I need to talk to someone professionally, I can make a call. I know that I can speak with people and get the support that I need to keep me going in the right direction.
>
> As for where else I want to go? I'm not sure. I know wherever God wants me to go, that's where I'm going to go. As long as I stay sober I know that it's positive. I know if I'm one drink away from not being positive, and that's where I do not want to be. So yes, it's definitely positive [referring to sense of future].

Ernie finds that his future rests in many of the activities and commitments he presently includes in his life. He puts sobriety as a top priority, along with his faith in God and Jesus Christ. He believes he has been forgiven and has the support of his God in his life. He holds numerous plans for his future, including marriage, home ownership, and planning board membership. He knows that he must help others, giving to those in need what he has been given. He is open to the will of God in his life and future and believes that his future will be secure as long as his sobriety is.

Summation. The veterans have all found ways to affirm life and sustain a meaningful existence. They all remain active in doing things they enjoy or grow from, ranging from commercial fishing, smoking, learning, writing, sobriety and religious pursuits. While Glen and Ernie have some sense of future, Andrew and Tim are stifled when it comes to future considerations. Andrew and Tim prefer to live in current realities rather than contemplate future ones.

Messages They Have for Those Who Want to Help Veterans

The interviews gave an opportunity for the veterans to give messages to those who try and help them. Their specific comments on which the following points are based can be found elsewhere (Appendix F). Below is a summarization of their suggestions for helpers:

- Engage the veteran so that he actively participates in his own therapy
- Getting started in therapy is the hardest aspect of it and the helper must be patient
- Initially, the Veteran will not want to discuss Vietnam
- There is a tendency for the veteran to blame nothing or too much on his Vietnam experience
- Therapy needs to consist of frequent visits without excessive time between sessions
- Monitor the veterans for substance abuse throughout treatment, for the potential to use substances is high during therapy
- Try to develop support for the veteran in his home environment when he begins therapy; educate supportive others so that they appreciate what recovery entails
- Do not begin trauma work with the veteran unless you are committed to see the therapy through to resolution; rough times are likely to occur
- An empathic understanding of the veteran's experience is necessary
- A healthy connection (or relationship) to the veteran is important
- Avoid cold, sterile approaches to treatment that appear "book-driven" and overtly structure-based; too much detachment from the veteran will arouse defensiveness. Do not give the structure driving the interview more attention than the veteran seeking help
- Assist the veteran in being honest with himself and to not hide from painful issues; self-deception can provide initial relief but results in more pain
- The helper should remain open and flexible to the veteran's experience; use the veteran as a resource in his own treatment

- Issues that appear extraneous or not central can be important in their own right and frequently lead to core issues
- Form a collaborative working relationship with the veteran
- Audio taping the interview is very helpful for the veteran who may not be paying close attention to his own story
- The "real" issues in treatment can easily remain buried or obscure; A part of the veteran wants to avoid confronting his pain and may do so if given the opportunity
- Be alert to cliché responses to questions that may be concealing pain and conflict
- Listen closely after asking a question and give ample time for a response to fully evolve
- Feelings of alienation and estrangement increase if the veteran leaves the session feeling misunderstood, or if he successfully convinces the interviewer that "everything is fine" thereby avoiding issues causing him pain and distress
- Understand the powerful reinforcement of certain themes that Vietnam teaches, such as emotional detachment from others and one's emotions
- Veterans deal with trauma differently, including different pacing, times of readiness to participate in therapy and issues to be resolved
- Any experience like Vietnam is going to require that people make sense of it, come to terms with it
- When the veteran is dealing with the trauma of Vietnam, he needs others in his environment to be understanding, supportive, flexible and provide him space
- If the trauma begins to surface in the veteran's life, that is an indication the veteran is ready to face it; When the trauma "bubbles up," there will be a counter-response of wanting to surpress it
- The veteran must find constructive ways of dealing with his traumatic experience when it does begin to surface in his life
- Others need to understand the excruciating pain and difficulties associated with addressing the veteran's Vietnam experience

- Assist the veteran in recognizing that his emotional numbness *is* a problem and will not just go away on its own
- The veteran must come to his own realization of problems; the conclusions of a counselor are insufficient if they are not also shared by the veteran
- Telling one's story is very important, just as reading what one said in his telling; there is a problem in that the veteran does not listen to his own words carefully, so reading what he has said is significant
- It is important to locate the "core issue" of the veteran which is often that he is not investing himself emotionally into his own life due to protective mechanisms
- Anything that can increase the veteran's motivation to change and to face his trauma is useful

<u>The Role of Society in Hurting and/or Helping Them</u>

There is consensus among the veterans that US society did not make their return home easy; some felt unwelcome. Most agree that society (including family and friends) wanted them to return without being changed or affected by the war. They were told not to dwell on Vietnam, but to let the past remain in the past. There was pressure to get on with their civilian lives. Some felt extreme hostility and animosity from society. The following paragraphs summarize the participants' quotes that are recorded elsewhere (Appendix G).

No one expected a parade like the returning W.W. II veterans, but no one expected to be criticized, spat upon, ignored and silenced. This response was entirely unexpected. They were not prepared for such a response and still feel the wound it inflicted many years back. Witnessing the returning Desert Storm troops ignited that wound once more. Although they were happy to see the Country support the returning soldiers, they flashed back to their own experience of returning from war. They believe they are largely responsible for society's demonstrative welcoming home of Desert Storm troops; society learned from their mistake with the Vietnam veterans (or at least certain politically active Vietnam veterans made sure it did not happen twice).

The overall mood of society prevented them from discussing Vietnam openly. The veterans returned with the "baggage" from war and from being traumatized but felt there was no where to go with it and no one to discuss it with. The pressure was to forget it and act like normal citizens. Since society did not want to hear and understand them, they felt alone and ostracized, and frequently withdrew or resorted to finding community with other veterans. They shared how they did not receive recognition for their sacrifice; even "thank yous" were rare. Society wanted to forget them and those who sacrificed their lives. Tim pointed out the fact that more veterans have died from suicide since the war than died in the war. As Andrew articulated, he would give off an impression that could distance and intimidate others from talking to him. The question is whether the distancing Andrew speaks of came before or after his sensed criticism and invalidation from society; he does not know.

Would a receptive and validating society have made a difference in the veterans' ability to heal? Would a positive homecoming and an effort to understand them have decreased the amount of time necessary for them to find healing? These are questions they wonder about. They express their regret that they were not able to get to their present state of recovery earlier. They hope that society has learned from their pain and suffering. They hope that society has learned what *not* to do to returning soldiers. In the final (fifth) interview, they shared that it is too late to help them and that they are set in their ways. They did however state that it is not too late to help those who come after them, those who serve their Country, risk their lives and sacrifice their innocence.

CHAPTER 6

DATA FROM GROUP INTERVIEW (INTERVIEW #5)

Areas Addressed in the Meeting

The final interview was a group interview that occurred after each veteran had read the profiles of the other three. Care was taken to insure each veteran was comfortable with his profile (i.e., degree of disclosure and how well the profile represented his story) before it was released to the other veterans. The three hour interview addressed the following topics: validation among them, feedback on the overall process of participation in the research (what it was like for them), factors about this writer as interviewer that helped or hindered their ability to share, who might benefit from this type of process if it were an intervention, the role of society, difficulties pertaining to group counseling, reflections on what they did in the group *today,* and saying "good-bye" (bringing closure to this process).

During the interview, the veterans realized how strongly they related to the phrases, problems and issues that they shared. In addition to the above topics, the veterans found a high degree of identification among the following interpersonal and intrapersonal areas: startle responses, anger reactions/violence potential/instant rage, drinking and drug usage to avoid or decrease painful affect, difficulty in interpersonal situations (i.e., tendency to end or distance relationships to others rather than work out conflict, protecting others from themselves), and discomfort in crowds. The above two lists of topics will now be elaborated upon.

Validation Between Them

Ernie and Tim were the most apprehensive about the joint interview because they had not participated in actual combat operations to the degree that Andrew and Glen had. At one point, Tim described not having the "John Wayne experience" (i.e. one's duties did not include front-line operations) as engendering a feeling of being "second class citizens;" Ernie readily agreed. Andrew was adamant in declaring that those who make such differentiations are people who really do not understand. Andrew states, "I say from my

heart, when you've been through war and you've been through more than you want to even think of, . . . when there's death around you, what the Christ is coming three feet closer to it? It's the same mud bath; it's the same swamp." There was a sense of validation and inclusion expressed and felt among the veterans regardless of their different military specialties.

Feedback on the Process of Participation in the Research

Glen shared how he felt "hesitant" and "antagonistic" when he initially came to participate in the first interview. He did not know what I (as the interviewer) wanted from him. He shared how he has a ". . . great disdain for people that take that experience [of Vietnam and use it] for something else." He was struck by the fact that ". . . I'm not alone," and how ". . . it's good to see that we've all shared similarly, if not the same experiences. So although I know I'm not alone, it's good to see it physically and to hear it. . . . He was surprised that he had such a good experience since the interviewer was not a veteran himself and therefore had no life experiences similar to his own. He shared that he learned much about himself and admitted to himself things that he had sensed but had never truly acknowledged within himself. He said in a semi-serious tone that he learned that he was "crazy." The other veterans would not accept this self-deprecation from Glen and voiced their perception that he seemed very intelligible and lucid to them.

Ernie stated that Glen was not "nuts" but that he *was* nuts. In fact, many of the veterans described themselves as "nuts" or "crazy" throughout the interview. It seems that what they implicitly mean by these self-portrayals is that they have been radically changed by their war experience and that some of the ways they have changed make them different from society at large. The differences can be salient when they are viewed in the context of a strictly civilian population; but, these same differences are often commonplace among the Vietnam veteran population.

In response to the prompt that asked Ernie to comment on his experience participating in this research, he made the following points. He believes that much of what

Vietnam veterans have tried to do is change others (i.e., society). This unreachable and ambitious goal has left them feeling fatigued and overwhelmed. He has learned to focus his efforts toward change back on himself and his involvement in Alcoholics Anonymous. He also takes an interest in helping others, especially younger veterans from Desert Storm that feel as "screwed up" as he felt at their age. This effort to help younger veterans so as to prevent the suffering that is akin to what Vietnam veterans had to experience, resonated with all the veterans who shared Ernie's desire to help. He saw this research project as a chance to help himself and others--both veterans and professionals--and felt positively about being involved.

Tim found reading the others' stories more interesting than reading his own. He identified with what others said, for example, when Glen discussed feeling like "two different people," Tim felt similarly. Tim thinks his own stories were not especially interesting because of all the writing he has done in the last five years. The interviews were largely a repetition of the same stories, with notable exceptions (e.g., his history of civil rights activism and how he was active in promoting the welfare of others in Vietnam, etc.). Tim shared how he was questioning the purpose of a final group interview, other than to reinforce camaraderie, or something of that nature. He believed the four interviews were sufficient. Once he was involved in the group interview, his attitude changed. He saw value in "bouncing off each other" about the process of the research and issues raised in the profiles. He concluded that the group interview was a valuable experience. Tim mentioned how participating in this project addressed his feeling of being "unworthy" in a positive way through a sudden realization:

> ". . . it just struck me that when you get a three-quarters-of-an-inch stack of stuff that you've spoken and somebody transcribed it, and then you read that--it's almost like reading your own biography or something like that--I think it lends validation to that [belief]: I'm worth something. If nothing else, somebody is taking the time to listen to all these tapes, [and] transcribe all this stuff. . . . I must be worth something. For me, it took a

> long time to feel like [I was worth something], because I was one of the ones who came back who had the experience of having somebody spit at me and call me baby-burner and stuff like that. I thought, "Well shit, maybe there's something to that or something. . ." . It always nags [you] in the back of your mind. For a long time it took me a while to feel like I am worthy, of course. I think this process of going through this and having it transcribed and given back to you is a way of validating your worth. You get it back and read it in black and white."

Andrew found himself agreeing with the comments of the others and so did not have much to add. He did note how odd it felt to read something that he had only spoken ". . . to a handful of people about." He shared how it is important to be selective in one's choice of audience when one does share this type of "baggage." He believes that sharing this material is best accomplished in the presence of other people with shared experience so that understanding can be found.

Factors About This Author *as Interviewer* that Helped and/or Hindered Their Ability to Share

Glen's experience of what I did that was, or was not, helpful during the course of the interviewers is found in his quote:

> . . . When I first came to you I was hesitant, and I think I mentioned that directly to you, for those reasons. But it was the fact that you allowed me to make the conversation. You guided, then you sat back and listened and the keys opened up the door and all the crap flowed out. You kind of navigated your way through all the BS of what I was putting out. It was very well done.

Glen found that the non-directive collaborative dialogue made him feel heard. He was able to share material that was previously difficult to put into words.

Ernie fully engaged in the interviews, finding it easy to share because I was referred by someone he trusted. He was largely motivated by the possibility that this project might

help other veterans. He believed he would get an "honest answer" and "honest direction" from me, knowing that I had worked with veterans in the past. He felt these expectations were fulfilled.

Tim describes his experience participating in the interviews with a non-veteran interviewer in the following passages:

> . . . I remember when a friend of mine approached me about doing this and I told him OK, and then I got to thinking about it. And I knew you weren't a vet and I knew you were doing this for your dissertation. . . . My biggest concern at the time was this guy might intellectually understand what we're talking about, but he's not going to *know,* because he hasn't been there and [had not] felt that. And I still don't know whether or not you *know* in the same sense that we do, because you weren't there. But then I decided in the long run, it probably wasn't important. I almost saw you as like the FNG. You get the guy, he comes in, he's cherry, he doesn't know anything and for some reason you take a liking to the guy. You want to give him the quick drill on what he needs in order to be able to survive. So you just kind of lay things out for him. So I kind of saw you as that way. It was like OK, for whatever reason . . . you need[ed] to give this stuff. So I figured it kind of like that in the beginning.
>
> I think the best thing you did in terms of making this work, is that you did very little at all. You didn't try to direct things in certain directions, you didn't interrupt the flow of things--or very little--and I think that was the most important thing. I've gone to groups a couple of times and pretty much shied away from them. I don't know, in a couple of groups I went to seemed like what you have is a bunch of people who want to be professional Vietnam vets. It's almost like they didn't want to give it [Vietnam] up, they just wanted to keep being there [Vietnam]. Or a couple of times, the shrinks who were running things were real directive in the terms of where they wanted to take things. This [research] was real good because it didn't do that, which I found the most helpful thing.
>
> . . . So I think it takes people that are willing to open themselves up to do it. But then once you get to that point, the thing that made me keep going on with it is that I didn't feel any sense of, "you're fucked up, you're

> not fucked up; you're crazy, you're not crazy; this is right, this is wrong," sort of thing. It was very open, very non-judgmental.

Tim agreed to work with me, knowing that I was *not* a veteran and that I would need his cooperation if this research was to succeed. He found the experience of helping me similar to helping an arriving veteran acclimate himself to Vietnam. Tom's effort to help me succeed, and support my personal success as an interviewer was akin to preparing the new veteran for life in a war zone. The implication is that I had to humble myself in order to receive Tim's assistance; I had to know enough to know how much I did not know. Tim felt that it was very important that I did not direct the interviews nor was I intrusive. His past experience in groups was negatively impacted by an overly directive group leader. He placed a high value on the "open, very non-judgmental" character of the interviews.

Andrew explains what he believes to have value in my role as interviewer:

> . . . You're no threat. How's that? Sum it up? You're no threat to my emotions. You're no threat to me telling you what it is. You don't do a lot of talking, you do a lot of listening. You took the time to get it out; you took time to let *me* get it out, and you spent a lot of time. I know without any doubt in my heart that you absolutely do care. You weren't there, you didn't claim to be there, you didn't claim to have the feelings of somebody that was there. You have the feelings of somebody who provides care, a caregiver. There's no facade with it. You didn't criticize, you didn't tell me I was doing things wrong. You didn't say, "Well, what you need to do with your life is this and that." You just listened, and you gave me a couple of different way to look at things, but you also allowed me the room and the space to look at it. It was never confrontational.
>
> . . . You haven't made the subject matter easy. I don't know how that could be done; I don't believe it can be. You've made it tolerable. That's how I feel. You genuinely care.

I was not found to be threatening to Andrew. He felt that I took the time, as much time as was necessary, to listen to his story told to his satisfaction. He felt that I was sincere and

caring and made no pretenses of understanding more than I really do. I was not perceived as critical or confrontative; but I make room to look at what he had said in respectful consideration. The material was extremely painful, yet the interview context made sharing tolerable. Andrew believes that care is paramount and need not only come from other veterans when he says, referring to me: ". . . And it's proof that somebody doesn't have to be there to care."

There were other considerations relevant to my performance as interviewer. An unexpected realization emerged from the dialogue when Tim wondered if there were actual benefits to veterans receiving help from non-veteran counselors. This thought was connected to Tim viewing me as an FNG. Tim shares his initial apprehension of my civilian status in stating: ". . . At first I thought this issue of not having been a vet is gonna erode Greg's credibility but I didn't find that's the case, but I don't know how to explain that except to say that he just pretty much let us direct it." When he reflected back on his therapy with veteran therapists, he noted a sense of subtle rivalry. It was as if the veteran helper can bring too much of his or her own agenda to the session, whereas someone who is not a veteran may actually be more open, without an agenda and may be a better option for many veterans. There was consensus for Tim's idea and agreement that Vietnam veterans can have an agenda of their own and tend to be too directive. Glen mentioned that Vietnam veterans can maintain a type of cutting and sarcastic humor which can impede sharing sensitive material.

On the other side of the issue, the participants agreed that the counselor who is also a veteran might have a better understanding of what the veteran is "hiding" from counseling. The veteran counselor is more apt to confront the veteran in healthy ways to promote honesty and healing.

The analogy of a "road map" was introduced by Ernie to emphasize how only looking for direction is inadequate. According to Ernie, there also needs to be knowledge of where the traveler has been and has come from. These interviews were valuable in that

they contained both past and future contexts. They very much appreciated knowing the structure of the interviews in advance and attributed much of the success of this approach to that.

Extending the travel metaphor further, they compared the interviews to being given square mileage that needs to be traversed (i.e., before, during, and after Vietnam). This parameter is the terrain, but the veteran creates his own map as he navigates through the terrain. The caregiver only needs to know the general terrain, but can leave the actual route taken to the veteran. The direction is supplied by the caregiver; the "how" of getting there is the veteran's responsibility. In this metaphor, therapy is more about cooperative map-making rather than trying to sell pre-formed maps. Pre-formed maps lack sufficient options that the veteran needs in order to feel comfortable on his journey.

A common element repeatedly cited--and highly appreciated--by the veterans was my comfort in collaborating closely with their story, never directing it or being intrusive. Andrew described it this way:

> ". . . Anybody that tells us [direction], anybody that chooses you're trade, must possess a great amount of empathy; must have the ability to put yourself in somebody else's hurting position. . . . You can feel for us as much as you want in terms of how we hurt. You can try to figure it out, think about it and think about a way out of it for us. But you haven't tried to direct us. You never tried to do that with me, [you] just let us listen to ourselves and explained to us what we're saying, just [by] repeating [what we have said to ourselves].

Who Might Benefit From This Type of Process if it Were an Intervention

The question of who might benefit from this type of process was discussed. It requires veterans who are willing to "open up;" participation in it must be voluntary. This process requires that the veteran ". . . has reached a point where they realized they're down in this hole and they don't want to be in this hole anymore and they're looking for some way to climb out of it," according to Tim. Until they reach this point, it is doubtful whether

this process will be helpful. It is also important, for future generations of soldiers, to *not* let them sink so deeply into their issues, but be more preventative and proactive in providing care. A type of therapeutic debriefing might be created that could act as a first step toward helping those exposed to trauma.

The participants came to the conclusions that for most Vietnam veterans, it was too late. They discussed how difficult--if not impossible in some cases--to reach veterans after this long period of time has set them securely in many of their ways. Also, many veterans have practice routines of self-medication to avoid pain and are not interested in facing their issues. They suggested that this information should be applied following our Country's next confrontation when it sends its soldiers to battle and they return.

The Role of Society

The participants believe that society needs to receive education in order to understand traumatization. The participants do not want society to treat Vietnam veterans as "second class citizens." Civilians need to understand that trauma sequelae does not just "go away." Civilians need to appreciate the significant needs of the returning veteran that exist immediately upon stepping back onto US soil. There needs to be a "listening audience" available and caregivers that can assist in the healing, the validation and the transition back to civilian life. Tim referred to the discontinuity of Vietnam as well as the temptation to ignore Vietnam upon returning when he said: ". . . It's like it became a very chopped off thing, both in terms of the beginning and the end. It is like I can put that [my Vietnam experience] in a box and shut the door on it. It doesn't work that way. I found that out fourteen years later."

The Country became divided over the political issues and neglected the individual warriors. This disparity of issues and attitudes contributed to an "emotional crippling" of thousands of veterans for at least some portion of their lives. The veterans were not allowed to go forward because the Country did not know how to handle Vietnam. Many civilians closed down and stopped caring. It is only now, when veterans are invited into

schools to speak to the younger generation about Vietnam, do they sense a desire to get the facts and to know the truth about war.

Difficulties Pertaining to Group Counseling

None of the veterans who had participated in group counseling found it significantly helpful. Tim shared about his discomfort with "professional veterans" that do not want to let go of Vietnam but desire to stay immersed in the war. None of the four veterans likes crowds. Andrew stated that groups are very difficult to run correctly, and it is difficult to maintain the right "mix" of people. He felt that groups usually consist of a few extroverted individuals who do the majority of talking, while individuals who are more reluctant to share, yet have a vital need to talk, often do not. The group can easily become overwhelmed by individuals who "take the group over." The other problem with group counseling can be individuals who feel pressure to tell lies to the group in order to gain acceptance and/or respect. When this happens, the whole group is invalidated.

The participates deemed this process to be preferable to the typical group therapy for several reasons. First, each veteran has an opportunity to tell his complete story without interruption. Then, each veteran bears witness to the others' stories. Only after completing these two prior steps do the veterans meet. The participants agree that many of the hazards of group therapy are avoided in this way.

Reflections on What They Did in the Group Today

In thinking about this interview, there were many reactions regarding what was accomplished. Andrew felt this process is an important part of the much larger process of living with Vietnam and making peace with it. Glen felt grateful that he met three men who are now a part of his life. Tim saw the meeting as providing "recognition of solidarity." Tim felt that this joint meeting made the process more than just an individual effort. By meeting face-to-face with the others who participated, there was a validation of common experience that was important to Tim. Ernie not only received information from today, but

gained a resource for problems he might face in the future. He was assured that he could call the others to get their input on difficult issues he may encounter.

Saying "Good-bye"

The veterans protested when the issue of "saying good-bye" was raised. They explained that they have all said too many good-byes in their lives. In essence, they said they do *not* say "good-byes." The issue of finding a way to say "good-bye" was pressed in spite of their efforts to avoid it. This led to a discussion of the guilt that they experience due to many commitments they have made and did not keep. They did not want to create such pressure, expectation and/or obligation during this meeting, by the way they said good-bye in this process. They articulated the concern that it was important to end without obligations. If they did make plans and were unable to keep them, they would feel worse (i.e., than if they had no plans). They each gave one another permission to call (exchanging numbers and addresses) and get together. They also agreed it was OK not to call and not get together. If they failed to get together, it would not be because they did not like and respect one another. They explained how they just go through periods where they maintain distance from others. By leaving the arrangement open and without pressure, they all felt better. There was an inherent understanding and acceptance about why they needed to carefully leave this meeting without obligation.

Topics Raised that Yielded a High Level of Identification Among the Veterans

Startle Responses. Each veteran had a story to tell about being intensely startled by sudden loud noises, especially those that resemble an explosion (door slamming, car backfires). They stated that the physiological reaction can be so severe they feel like they are about to have a heart attack. Another common startle situation involves being awoken. Caution needs to be practiced when waking them or they may react violently.

Anger Reactions and Violence; Instant Rage. They all struggle with intense anger reactions and the fear of hurting someone severely when angered. Often, their only defense when provoked by others is to simply walk away from the situation. They seem to have an

all-or-nothing response pattern to anger and corresponding behaviors. By trying to avoid the situation, they can often manage it. They have each had unfortunate instances of intimidating their families with anger and yelling. They discussed the "power trip" and the "rush" of such anger, admitting it felt good--even though it was not healthy or responsible. Often, after the anger subsides, they feel badly and are prone to self-denigration. Their advice to one another was to always have an escape route and never be cornered in by anger, otherwise "you [referring to the veteran himself] are screwed." They discussed living in fear of doing what they are capable of doing. An unsuspecting provocateur does not recognize how comfortable with violence some of the veterans are. This is the reason the veterans try to walk briskly away so as to not engage themselves in a probable altercation.

Drinking and Drug Usage to Avoid or Decrease Painful Affect. Andrew explained how Vietnam veterans "developed the word 'self-medicate'." The reason is to stop emotional pain. It is an attempt to stay numb. The vets have all "self-medicated" at different times in their lives. Veterans can use alcohol, prescription drugs or illicit drugs to avoid feeling pain. The problem with substance abuse as Andrew sees it is that ". . . until you feel the pain you can't cure it." Self-medication is like smoke that blinds the veteran from seeing the real problem and thus prevents resolution of it.

Difficulty in Interpersonal Situations. There is strong agreement that this area is very difficult for each of them to manage. Rather than work out conflicts that arise in relationships, there is a tendency for the veterans to distance or entirely cut themselves off from the relationship. Tim shared how he watched a lot of people die and that powerfully reinforced the belief that "people go away." Also, since Vietnam, there is a "certain emotional flatness" that encompasses his life and makes ending relationships "almost too easy." Glen told about the effect of loss on him and how ". . . once you experience relationships that right-front go away there's something inside of you that disconnects." Glen explained how he was only a "kid" while in a very responsible position in Vietnam

and how he wanted to be close and feel connected to his guys. After losing so many of the them, ". . . that pretty near killed me." Tim explained about the need to build fences around oneself and not allow people to get very close. Andrew replied that if a fence is not resurrected, one suffers tremendously.

In trying to explain his emotional distance to his wife, Andrew states, ". . . these are defense mechanisms. These are so that I can go on. You need to understand that when this wall goes up, we'll call it an emotional wall, it's going up for a reason. . . . It's the way I deal with it and if you don't like that, I respect that, but you have to understand it's not something I do to be cruel, it's something I do to survive; that's what it is." They all agree that women have difficulty understanding their "emotional walls." To remedy this misunderstanding, they support the idea of having a neutral third person help interpret these defenses to the spouse. The third person can also help the veteran to realize how his withdrawal affects everyone around him.

Another reason they remain detached from others is to protect others from them. Tim supports this reason when he states, ". . . if I know that I have the potential to turn into a bouncing betty, I don't want the other people that I care about to be around me when I blow. So it's like if I keep you put away a little bit then you may not get as hurt."

The problem with pushing others away comes when you need their help. Andrew explains how ". . . it's very easy to fall through the crack if you have pushed everybody away from you and then you get into that mode. You have successfully pushed everybody away from you and nobody's gonna reach that hand down in the hole to lift you out, you're gone, you're cooked."

Discomfort in Crowds. In trying to understand their extreme anxiety associated with being in groups of people, Glen pointed out two things: crowds draw fire and establish the interval. These phrases were a part of their military training. In war, crowds were easy targets and would draw out the fire of the opponent. Establishing the interval pertained to the correlation between the space between people and the degree of casualty

caused by an explosive device. The closer people are to one another, the more lethal the explosive charge is. To this day, the training these veterans have received still exerts influence on their behavior.

Summary

The final interview provided an opportunity for the veterans to meet each other and talk directly about issues pertaining to how their lives have been affected by Vietnam. They found much "validation of common experience" as they strongly identified with each other in language (i.e., phrases and terminology), common problems and salient issues. They were surprised, once they began talking, at how easily they related. They expressed validation for the risk, suffering, and exposure to death shared by each veteran, regardless of their MOS. Pain was *not* compared, as it sometimes is when veterans gather (i.e., who saw more combat and therefore suffered more), but was acknowledged as pain; and pain is pain. There was a "recognition of solidarity" in the very fact that they survived. They understood that some of their behavior since Vietnam may appear "nuts" to civilians untainted by the war experience. They were clear in sharing that the behaviors which society views as odd make perfect sense in the context of combat in guerrilla warfare. The dialogue that transpired connected them in novel and meaningful ways. They adamantly agreed that society needs to be educated on traumatization. The main point society must understanding is that "trauma doesn't just go away." The veterans that return from combat have significant needs--not least among them is that of an audience *that takes the time* and makes the effort to listen.

Reading their transcripts was like reading their biographies. The process of being interviewed, having those interviewed be transcribed and reading the transcription all imply two things: their stories are important and they are worthy. The critical role this message plays, that their stories are important and they are worthy, must be understood in the context of returning home after a war and being blamed for the war, spat upon, called names, silenced and discriminated against. And even if these damaging experiences did not

happen to every veteran, every veteran is aware of these stories and experiences them vicariously. Exposure to this dominant societal discourse erodes the self worth of the veteran and causes self doubt (i.e., "maybe society's accusations are truth?"). The entire thrust of this research validated their stories, and in doing so, validated their lives.

The final interview solicited feedback regarding my role as interviewer (witness). According to the veterans, there were several behaviors and attributes that were considered important in making the interviews successful. First, I allowed conversation to develop freely and unintrusively. My guidance was present (i.e., questions that were sensitive to dialogue) but was minimal and respectful. I did not interrupt the flow of the dialogue or try to direct it. Second, I listened; I took the time to listen to the story, never rushing them. Third, I was not judgmental and never conveyed a critical attitude toward them. Fourth, I was not a "threat" to them. One of the attributes that allowed them to feel comfortable with me as an interviewer was the fact of my non-veteran status. They felt that there was no rivalry or unspoken agenda or implicit political view being offered to them. They found that I was free to listen openly since I was a more of a learner and not a fellow participant in the war. Fifth, I never claimed to have the feelings of someone who was there. They respected this limitation because I first acknowledged it. It seemed as if they were very willing to help me understand once they recognized I was eager and willing to learn from them. Sixth, I helped to hold and value different perspectives on their experience. With multiple perspectives available, new connections were realized. Seventh, I helped them to listen and understand what they were saying. This was done through both having them tell their story and then reading their own story and highlighting things that stood out for them in the reading. Eighth, they felt I was able to extend empathy to them and their stories.

The veterans' proposed the analogy of a map in describing the optimal role of a good interviewer/witness. The person who seeks to hear and understand the veteran's experience must comprehend more than just the veteran's current and future direction in life. If one wants to understand, he must obtain knowledge pertaining to where the veteran

has come from and has been in his life. They said that the therapist must have some preliminary knowledge of the general terrain the veteran needs to traverse to recover from war, but the *veteran* creates his own map as he navigates the terrain. Thus, this ensures a cooperative map-making process. The veteran is responsible for resolving issues pertaining to navigation in the detailed and rugged terrain of his experience while the therapist keeps track of the overall direction.

As they were discussing my role and ability as interviewer, there was apparent support and consensus for the eight comments made above. The only possible concern expressed by some of the veterans was my non-veteran status. In other words, not being a veteran could be seen as a strength in many ways but could also pose a problem. The problem they connoted concerned the ability to "catch" them if they were dishonest or withholding. They felt another veteran could confront them on such matters since a veteran could detect such avoidance of important issues. There was not full agreement on this point, however. The attributes of *not* being directive or critical and carefully listening to them, qualities that they found successful, would create a very different atmosphere in the interview than the act of confrontation (i.e., regarding not being fully honest, etc.). Also, even though some expressed concern about being held to the "truth" of their experience, they were surprised at how open and honest they were in the interviews, without any pressure or prompting to be forthcoming or to be more fully disclosing. In summary, they felt the interview process was very effective even though I was not a veteran. They admitted they can (and some have been) be withholding and very selective in their disclosure in discussing Vietnam but all of them were extremely candid and open during this process. There was also some surprise at how easy it was to be so unguarded in this process.

Since group therapy is often recommended as treatment for trauma survivors, the veterans' comments on the subject of group therapy will be briefly included--especially since they tended to oppose it. Three of the four veterans have experienced group therapy

for Vietnam-related issues, and they each had ambivalent experiences in groups. The veterans all preferred this interview process to conventional group therapy for the following reasons. First, they valued the equality of participation in this research. This process is based on everyone telling their story to their satisfaction without interruption. Then, each participant reads each other's story prior to meeting. This methodology makes the group meeting feel more comfortable and seem as if they have met previously. Second, the depth and breadth of sharing is enhanced in this process. Their sharing is more comprehensive in scope since Vietnam is understood in the context of their lives. Traditional group therapy does not usually offer this degree of extensive coverage pertaining to the developmental history of its members. Third, there is no threat of individuals monopolizing the group in ways that prevent other group members from sharing their story. Fourth--and this reason was not stated by the veterans but is inferred by this writer--there is care taken to insure the accuracy and confidentiality of the veterans' stories. They do not run as high of a risk of prematurely disclosing information that they might later regret since they read (and re-read) their transcripts. This opportunity to censor what they share gives them choice and protection should they choose to retract something they share. They know of this opportunity to censor what they say in the beginning which may create a very free and safe climate in which to tell their story. Fifth, there is no competition in terms of stories shared. Since they initially share individually, they do not feel pressure to alter their story in any way. Their story is accepted and valued without any exposure to invalidating remarks or comparing of "war stories."

The group needed to find closure. They all refused to say "good-bye," claiming they do not say good-bye to others at this point in their lives. After urging them to find some way to say good-bye, any creative way they were comfortable with, they decided to remain open to future meetings without any obligations. They wanted to avoid the dreaded situation--which each one of them knows very well--of making an interpersonal commitment and then failing to keep it. With the unfulfilled commitment--often due to

periods of isolation--comes self-denigration and guilt. They found a way to say good-bye that leaves the future open and avoids the threat of letting someone down.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Purpose, Process and Main Findings

Through this study I attempted to listen to Vietnam combat veterans tell their stories within the context of postmodern theory. Specifically, I sought to collaboratively join with the veteran in the dialogue--conceived as a meaning making process--by acknowledging the reciprocal effects of the interviewer and interviewee on each other. The veteran shared his Vietnam experience in the context of his life narrative, and I bore witness. In addition to considering the intrapsychic elements of traumatology, this study emphasized the social construction of meaning and identity as revealed in the veteran's life and the interview dialogue.

A postmodern theoretical approach was chosen because it enables the helper to bear witness, form a collaborative relationship and craft a coherent, and meaningful survivor narrative: three important elements in the treatment of trauma survivors. In this study I sought to understand what the veteran's experience of telling his story, then witnessing his story, and then having other veterans witness his story (and he their stories), was like for him.

The above stated research purposes were accomplished by adapting Siedman's (1991) model of in-depth interviewing to four individual interviews and one final group interview. The four interviews segmented the veteran's life into pre-Vietnam, Vietnam, post-Vietnam, and anticipation of future as well as reactions to the interview process. Each interview was transcribed and given to the veteran to read prior to the subsequent interview. He was also asked to highlight anything in his interview that stood out to him upon reading it. Reading his own transcripts allowed the veteran to witness his own narrated story. Upon completing the four interviews, the veteran received a "profile" that summarized his interviews in his words. The profile is an edited version of all four interviews that tells the veteran's story. After the veteran read his profile for approval and

confidentiality, it was shared among the other three veterans. In a reciprocal fashion, the other veterans shared their profiles with him. This sharing of profiles allowed the veterans to witness each others' stories. Upon completion of the veterans reading all the profiles, a joint meeting was held. Together, they discussed their stories and the experience of participating in the research process.

The general findings of this study can be summarized as follows. First, the veterans all agreed that it was very valuable for them to participate in this research, and they supported the underlying methodology. As delineated in chapter five, the veterans all participated fully in the research project. They found the interviews enlightening and "different." Three of them had experienced therapy (individual and group) in the past, and they commented that this process was different in the sense that it was able to achieve ends that were not achieved in prior attempts at seeking help. They felt that my role as a witness (interviewer) was important and gave me feedback on what I did--as an interviewer--that helped them to tell their story (this information will be referred to below). They also gave feedback on what the interview process did for them that was valuable and healing. They found reading and highlighting their interview transcripts to be a valuable experience. They found that the opportunity to have their stories witnessed by other veterans, and, to witness the stories of other veterans, to be a powerful and crystallizing experience that produced solidarity around the fact that they are all survivors. The group interview was an experience of significant identification among issues and mutual validation that was generously offered to one another. No criticism or discontent about any aspect of participation was noted. In fact, some expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of the experience. All viewed their participation as important and were devout in meeting the numerous requirements.

Second, the veterans found it important--and novel--to share their Vietnam experience in the context of their life narrative. They were able to make novel connections between events, themes and cause-and-effect relationships that were made possible only because their life narrative was held in focus. None of the veterans had ever told their life

story before or viewed Vietnam in such a broad context. Some of the veterans would remark, on the way out the door after their interview, that they needed to revisit a new theme or new connection they made in the interview that intrigued them greatly.

Third, the large amount of text taken from the interviews allows the reader (audience) to astutely understand many of the interpersonal and intrapersonal themes, issues, and struggles that these veterans experienced after the war. The fact that these excerpts are in their own words gives the audience an appreciation of the effects of trauma sequelae on the veteran's experiential world.

Fourth, the veterans were able to discern characteristics of a good witness (e.g., therapist) that enable the telling of the trauma narrative. This information was based on their individual and group reflections of how I performed the role of witness and interviewer and on their past experiences with therapists. This information will be recapitulated in a later section pertaining to training therapists.

Fifth, responses to Lifton's four questions (Chapter 3) will be offered based on the interview material. In terms of their relationship history of connection and separation form others, Vietnam definitely played an altering role. Each of the veterans experienced times of intense connection to other team members in Vietnam. Some of the veterans miss that connection and have not had it replicated since Vietnam. Since Vietnam, they report relationship difficulties ranging from spouses (e.g., separations and divorces), to friends and coworkers. They share the way they actually protect others from themselves; from their tendency to isolate from others and not keep social obligations.[2] Some of the veterans shared how they remained distant from others because they were remaining distant from themselves in their effort to be a "solid citizen" or to blend into society like a "chameleon." Some of the veterans shared very vividly the ways they experience distance--as well as continue to maintain it--with others. They have been extremely close to others and have had them suddenly and violently killed. They commented that this type of loss permanently altered them so that now, maintaining some degree of distance from others always feels

preferable to getting too close. The one exception to the rule of disconnection was other veterans. They frequently maintained more connection to other veterans than they did with civilians. There was also a sense among the veterans that they had reached a point in their lives where they seek to connect more with others now (e.g., family members) than they ever have since Vietnam.

In terms of their history of movement and stasis regarding their meaning making processes, Vietnam--and the defenses against remembering and feeling the pain caused by the war experience--fostered a clear process of stasis. The profiles capture how each veteran spent numerous years trying *not* to be affected by Vietnam. They described reaching a point where their lives had lost meaning for them. At some point in each of their lives, they confronted their traumatic experiences. With this effort to resolve their war experience came a burgeoning reaffirmation of life. They began to re-animate their frozen trauma imagery and feel affect which had been avoided for years. Movement, creativity and healing became a part of the veteran's journey of recovery. Whether it was through writing, therapy or self-help groups, each veteran reached a point in their life where movement was found and healing ensued.

In terms of integrity and disintegration, the Vietnam experience exposed veterans to a war-time context (i.e., guerrilla warfare) very different from civilian life. The result of being exposed to such drastically disparate contexts was disintegration. The veterans discussed feeling as if they had "two selves" or felt as if they were a "fly on the wall" observing themselves going through situations without being immanent in them. There was a ubiquitous difficulty associated with creating a coherent sense of self. The sense of self described by the veterans was fragmented and confused for large portions of their lives. The methodology of this research actually helped to promote a coherent survivor narrative in the fact that it had each veteran produce their story spanning across the life they have lived.

One question that can be raised regarding the issue of dissimilar contexts is this: why did the veterans experience such a sense of vitality while in Vietnam? Of course there was tragedy, but many of them mentioned missing the "rush" of Vietnam and the clear sense of mission and power to execute their job. Nietzsche provided the following counsel: "Live dangerously, it is the only time you live at all" (as quoted in Gergen, 1994, p. 197). Gergen (1994) points out how "moments of high drama are often those which most crystallize our sense of identity" (p. 197). In considering this premise there is a question: is the focal issue surrounding disintegration one of exposure to war trauma or is disintegration more a matter of negotiating vastly dissimilar contexts? If the later issue is in fact the more salient of the two in producing a fragmented sense of identity, then the question becomes: how can the country that welcomes home its warriors provide a transitioning context that decreases the disintegration effect experienced by the veteran? A related concern is: what happens when the welcoming country of the warrior is antagonistic toward his return; or, perhaps the answer to this question can be found in the plight of these Vietnam veterans.

In terms of maintaining continuity of life on the ultimate level (i.e., symbolization of life and death), four of the five modes that affirm life (and symbolize immortality) were mentioned by the veterans. Lifton (1976) discussed the relevance of symbolizing and expressing immortality for individuals who have been immersed in death. The mode most often mentioned by the veterans was the "biological mode." They envision a future where they are intimately involved in the lives of their children and grandchildren. They find hope in such a vision, living in and through their offspring. The "religious mode" was embraced by one participant. He found his Judeo-Christian faith paramount in his ability to affirm life and secure a meaningful existence. The "creative mode," the mode where one's works and contributions are designed to live on past one's death, was apparent in the veterans' stories. A couple of the veterans are writers. They have transformed their experience into the written word so that it lives on. One veteran has published many of his works. Other

veterans go and speak to children about war. Their experience of sharing could possibly affect the future generation, thus leaving a legacy behind. All agreed that helping other veterans is important. Their urgency to help, which is viewed as a creative effort, is not limited to Vietnam veterans, but to all veterans currently suffering from PTSD (i.e., Persian Gulf War) and future wars and conflicts. The fourth mode is one of "experiential transcendence." One veteran discussed getting lost in transcendent-like moments where there is a great sense of connectedness with creation. He looks for these experiences and values them immensely. He loses himself in the wonder and awe of the moment. The last mode, the mode of "nature," was not directly addressed by the veterans, but may have been implied. One veteran found peace and solace in nature, being out on the ocean. He finds this environment liberating and vital to his well-being. To discern whether he felt a sense of immortality through being survived by nature itself, or if being adrift in the Atlantic is more an expression of the transcendent mode, is unclear.

Sixth, narrative analysis from the veterans' profiles (Chapter 4) will be briefly considered. Narratives can be understood as consisting of rudimentary forms. Several of the prominent narrative forms in contemporary culture are: the tragic narrative, the regressive narrative, the comedy-romance, the happily-ever-after myth, and the heroic saga (Gergen, 1994). The profiles of the participants consisted of both the "comedy-romance narrative" and the "heroic saga." Many of the veterans' profiles were marked by a regressive narrative (post-Vietnam years) that is followed by a progressive narrative (facing Vietnam-related issues and finding healing) and then a stability narrative ensues (their sense of future). This sequence is the comedy-romance narrative. The heroic saga is a series of progressive-regressive phases in one's life narrative (i.e., a continuous array of battles in life). Some of the veterans may have identified with the heroic saga at times in their life. All the veterans seem to have reached a stability narrative in their lives. Veterans who have not confronted their trauma may be described as living their life according to the heroic saga, or, more despairingly, the tragic narrative (i.e., a rapid downfall of one who had achieved a

high position). The life-span interviews in this study lend themselves quite naturally to such a narrative analysis.

The Degree that the Process Achieved its Purpose

This research process achieved its purpose with a surprising degree of efficacy. In the context of the study, I was able to bear witness to each of the four veterans' stories, form a collaborative relationship and craft a coherent survivor narrative for each participant. The study's design (i.e., reading one's own and other participant's profiles) also enabled the veterans to bear witness to their own story and each others' stories. Each participant found it to be very beneficial to understand Vietnam in the context of his life narrative. The final individual interview and the group meeting all supported the following results: the process was helpful, the process was educational and therapeutic, and the process made them feel better about themselves. All participants supported the utility of this process in helping the traumatized veteran if he or she is motivated and at a place in his or her life where involvement in such a process is possible.

What in the Literature is Confirmed by this Study

This examination of the literature will be conceptual because other studies with similar methodology were not found in the literature pertaining to trauma survivors. This study reveals how the Vietnam veteran has been affected by his war trauma and needs to tell his story to find significant healing. The findings of this study support the need for helpers to bear witness to the trauma survivor. The therapist acts as an "external unifying center" (Firman & Russell, 1994) who witnesses the story and holds together vague and fragmented elements of the story until a coherent narrative that links the elements can be found. Meaning making as an important element in the individual's effort to organize his or her experience is supported by in the literature (Mahoney, 1991; Guidano, 1991, 1987; Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; Rosen & Kuehlwein, 1996). Because the survivor of trauma often experiences psychic numbing that impairs the meaning making process in

stereotypical ways (Lifton, 1976, 1973, 1988), theories that re-animate the meaning making process by restoring flexibility, abstraction, and self-integration are important.

The meaning making process is facilitated in the performance of the survivor narrative; the transformative value of storytelling (Russell & Wandrei, 1996). The narrative models of therapy take into account the importance of the narrator-witness context. The meanings are generated *in-between* the narrator and the witness, creating a shared sense of reality based on the survivor's efforts to tell the story and the witness's efforts to empathically witness the story (and storyteller). This relationship avoids the dominance of authoritarian epistemologies by seeking to institute a collaborative relationship. Numerous theories seek to facilitate the conversational construction of meaning (Sarbin, 1986; White & Epston, 1990; McNamee & Gergen, 1992; Anderson, 1995; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Rosen, 1996).

This research explains how a society can have its own dominant "grand narratives" that impede its ability to bear witness to those who have been traumatized. If one's story deviates from the larger social constructions of reality, the story is marginalized and silenced. Theories and therapy models that address issues of social constructions and multiple realities reveal how broad and often unconscious our cultural narratives are and advocate for making room for traumatized individuals who have a story to tell (McNamee, 1992, 1996; McNamee & Gergen, 1992; Gergen, 1994, 1985; Shotter, 1993; Cushman, 1995, 1993; Grand, 1995). Hermeneutical theory (Gadamer, 1976; Wachterhauser, 1986; Grondin, 1994; Woolfolk, Sass & Messer, 1988; Palmer, 1969) and approaches to therapy (Anderson, 1996; Barclay, 1992; Chessick, 1990, 1986; Cushman, 1993; Dreyfus & Wakefield, 1988; Efran & Fauber, 1995; Sass, 1988) also can help by sensitizing the helper to appreciate the historical, political, and cultural contexts that affect the survivor and can impair the helper's ability to bear witness.

What New Knowledge was Generated Beyond the Literature Regarding Vietnam Veterans with PTSD, the Effects of the Storytelling and Witnessing Process, and this Process as a Mode of Research

This study makes two new contributions to the field of traumatology. First, it explains how we "inhabit" our stories and need to tell them in order to understand ourselves. Second, it attempts to apply a postmodern emphasis to the conceptualization and treatment of postraumatic stress reaction.

In many ways, we are our stories (McAdams, 1993). Mair (as quoted in Neimeyer, 1995a), describes the important role that stories play in one's identity:

> I want to claim much more than the comfortable platitude that stories are a good thing and should be attended to. Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart. We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place. It is this enveloping and constituting function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully. (p. 176)

Since one inhabits his or her stories, and stories are meant to be communicated, he or she must share them. If one cannot find an audience to tell his or her stories to, his or her existence is marginalized and his or her identity is subjugated to the dominant cultural narratives that tell one who he or she is. Since power is the ability to define oneself, those without power will be defined by those who have power (Zogby, 1997).

The Vietnam veteran has a story to tell. He will find himself in the story and evolve as his story evolves. Since every story needs an audience, he is vulnerable if he lives in a society that does not seek to understand his stories. The society may try to impose their stories upon him.

Through this study I focused on the veteran as a storyteller and provided him with several opportunities to have his story witnessed by myself, himself, veterans and others.

This emphasis on trauma, storytelling, corresponding methodology, and the outcome, contributes relevant information to the field that demonstrates unusually effective innovative ways to help people recover from PTSD.

The other contribution that this study generates is the emphasis on postmodernist theory and therapy in the conceptualization and treatment of traumatization. Postmodernist thought proposes that reality is socially created and maintained and that it is historically situated. Reality exists in-between people, in and through language (stories). Postmodern theory is--by definition--extremely capable of guiding clinicians to bear witness.

Care was taken in this study to avoid the common dichotomy existing between the "self" and the "social" that is frequently encountered in the field of psychology (Neimeyer, 1995b, p. 13). The postmodern accentuates social determinism and public observable sources of data, while many of the more conventional modernist theories assign centrality to agentic "selfhood processes" that emphasize individual free will and endorse the private and subjective. Rather than privilege one aspect of this dialectic over the other, this author values both as evident in its appreciation for the individual, social and cultural contexts that embed the trauma survivor.

As the veterans' stated, this approach has the potential to help trauma survivors of all types. The methodology is quite flexible and capable of readily being adapted to other trauma populations who would benefit from telling their story. Interviewing trauma survivors using this format also generates information on individual, social and cultural levels pertaining to the negative contributors to PTSD and suggests positive contributors in the recovery process. More discussion on methodology will occur in the section addressing future research.

Implications for Understanding and Helping Veterans and Other Trauma Survivors, Training Therapists, and Future Research

The Storytelling Nature of Human Beings

Human beings are story-telling creatures (Schafer, 1992; Roberts, 1994; Engel, 1995). This assertion has important implications. By "storying" one's experience--both mundane daily events as well as dramatic encounters--one becomes known by others and by oneself. One tells one's story to another; the other becomes the audience, capable of bearing witness to the narrative. In the absence of audience, one does not tell his or her story and therefore, is likely to give less credence to his or her own experience. Bearing witness to one's own story refers to validating one's experience and meaning making processes. It means that one takes seriously what he is experiencing and uses it as a reference in determining his behavior. One tends to validate his own experience more when he perceives it to be valued by significant others and his local culture (Bruner, 1990).

Just as the individual (storyteller) is situated in the context of his audience, the audience is situated in the broader context of competing grand narratives. The cultural level[3] of made meanings (i.e., "knowledges") consists of grand narratives that favor certain stories (i.e., ways of understanding events and their relatedness) while subjugating others. A "grand narrative" refers to an over-arching story that is given credence by a large and/or substantially influential group of people who persuasively advocate for it. There is a tendency to be unaware of the grand narratives that particular cultures maintain unless one's story is marginalized (i.e., it differs from the dominant cultural stories) or one travels to foreign cultures.

To summarize up to this point, the storyteller (individual realm), the audience (social realm) and the competing grand narratives (the cultural realm) are all interconnected. The cultural embeds the social which embeds the individual. This research has been sensitive to each of the three levels as well as to the interplay between the levels. The following elaboration of individual, social and cultural

realms will demonstrate how the traumatized individual is embedded in these contexts and how healing--understood as telling one's story to an empathic witness--needs to examine these realms.

The Individual (Storyteller)

At the individual level, humans depend on language to understand their experience and make sense of events in their lives. As one gains more differentiation and integration in his or her personal meanings, he or she becomes more "complex." The growth of an individual (their evolutionary success) is reliant upon increasing degrees of complexity. Both the role of language and of complexity are important in understanding how the survivor of trauma is affected by traumatic experience. Each is delineated below.

The Need to Explain Experience in Language

There exist two streams of consciousness involved in experiencing oneself in one's world that are in ongoing dialectic with each other (Greenberg & Pascual-Leone, 1995; Guidano, 1987, 1991). Greenberg & Pascaul-Leone (1995) label these two forms of consciousness: *explanation* and *direct experience*. Explanation consists of consciously mediated direct experience, or, experience that has been transformed into language or conceptual form and is capable of being reflected upon. For example, when one watches the protagonist in a movie suffer countless losses, one can feel sadness usually experienced as a sensation composed of emotion, thought and bodily states (e.g., sense of heaviness in stomach). One is likely to know why she is experiencing these states and can explain this to herself (and others). In fact, she may even make connections to actual events from her past that stimulated similar sensations.

By contrast, direct experience is immediate and implicit (or tacit) experience that constitutes the ongoing experiencing of the individual. If the same movie-goer experienced traumatic losses that she has never made sense of and has lived in a

continuous effort to "not deal with" her losses, then she would have a direct experience prompted by the movie but would be unable to explain the intensity of her ongoing experience. She may not understand why she feels stomach cramps, cannot seem to stop crying, does not want to eat or cannot fall asleep later that night. In this instance, she is having direct experience, just like the first example, but what is different in this scenario is the fact she cannot explain--to herself or to others--*why* she is experiencing this distress. There is no explanatory link between her experience and her story; or, her story of traumatic loss has never really been told and empathically heard).

In relation to these two forms of consciousness, "meaning is neither imposed on experience by language nor wholly contained in experience but, rather, is generated in a dialectical construction. This construction is continuously guided by an implicit felt sense" (Greenberg & Pascual-Leone, 1995, p. 170). In other words, meaning is not simply "in us" but depends on linguistic distinctions (i.e., words and symbols) that express and define felt bodily experience. Words bring this felt sense to full awareness. Without finding words--or some form of representation--the felt sense remains implicit, unable to reaching its full expression and intelligibility. Greenberg & Pascual-Leone state: "Articulation, usually through language, is therefore crucial in the creation of new conscious experience and meaning" (p. 171). Guidano (1995) describes the same dynamic experiencing-explaining process:

> Human experience, therefore, appears as the emerging product of a process of mutual regulation continuously alternating between experiencing and explaining--that is, a process in which ongoing patterns of activity (immediate experience) become subject to linguistic distinctions and are reordered in terms of symbolic propositions distributed across conceptual networks. The level of symbolic reordering (explanation) makes possible new categories of experience, such as true-false, real-unreal, right-wrong,

> and subjective-objective, to name a few. This interdependence between subjective and objective, emotioning and cognizing, experiencing and explaining, and so forth, is constitutive of any human knowing process, just as is feeling ourselves to be alive (p. 95).

This dynamic process requires--or implies--an audience. The role of an audience is to bear witness to one's languaging attempts, enabling one to tell his or her story which serves to help clarify and understand his or her immediate felt sense. The vital role played by an audience illustrates how meaning (and self) is always, to some degree, a social construction.

Traumatic events directly impinge upon the interplay between direct experience and explanation. The survivor of trauma experiences intense affect and vivid imagery (as well as other sensory cues) that are difficult to understand or articulate. Because of the distress associated with remembering the trauma and re-feeling it as it is recalled, the survivor often avoids fully acknowledging the trauma experience, treating it as if it is not real or like it will just fade out of existence if ignored. This avoidance leaves the traumatic experience in undifferentiated somatic states and active memory stores (van der Kolk, 1994; Horowitz, 1986). The self-organization is disrupted; disintegration characterizes the self (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Epstein, 1991). Affective and cognitive states oscillate between intrusion and numbing (Horowitz, 1986). Over time, numbed affect has a deleterious effect upon relationships (Lifton, 1973; Herman, 1992). The survivor is likely to avoid assigning words to his or her experience (i.e., explaining to oneself what happened so as to assimilate and/or accommodate the trauma and restore integration to oneself) due to previous unsuccessful attempts to make sense of it.

As a result of the content seeming too traumatic in nature to mention and/or an inability to find an empathic audience, the survivor frequently isolates, declining to tell his or her story. The untold story remains tacitly active and affects the

individual's ongoing experiencing. The untold trauma experience is stored in a form of chronic somatic tension. One's felt experience effectively becomes unintelligible. The survivor searches for more effective ways of quieting the distress and disintegration within. Since he or she is embedded within the trauma experience, attempts to gain perspective and understanding *without* involving another, are rarely effective.

Complexity and the Aftermath of Trauma

The individual evolves to the extent he or she achieves complexity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993). By "complexity," Csikszentmihalyi means both differentiation and integration. Greater complexity is advantageous for optimal functioning and evolution. The degree of complexity obtained by any individual is directly proportional to the extent that the person is both differentiated and integrated. In other words, the individual who has obtained a degree of self-definition (i.e., multiple pursuits, commitments and challenges that create different structure and function to the individual's abilities) that, while highly defined, is nevertheless integrated and cohesive (i.e., harmony among the pursuits, commitments and challenges which share mutual goals), is more capable of adaptation than the individual who has *only* differentiation or *only* integration.

Traumatization acts to impede the progression of complexity. The differentiation pole of complexity frequently becomes embedded. The survivor's post-trauma inner experience is one of subjective distress, intense and unbidden affect, doubt and periods of emotional numbness. There is no longer a clear sense of who one is, and who one *was* (i.e., pre-trauma) is no longer a viable way of being in the world.

The integration pole of complexity is also challenged when faced with traumatization. The individual often feels fragmented, as if he where two people: the traumatized self and the pre-trauma self (Laufer, 1988). The ability to integrate

these different selves is often lacking. The tempting alternative is to "hide" or eliminate one "self" and embrace the other. This disavowal of one's experience fosters further fragmentation, as well as rigidity and dissociation.

Telling the story of one's trauma experience helps to reinstate the complexity that is so valuable in adapting to life's challenges and resolving life's problems. In the act of telling, one distances himself from the story. He differentiates the story more each time he shares it. Reading one's story (i.e., transcripts) and highlighting aspects that stand out for him, facilitate additional degrees of disidentification from the trauma narrative. Once one has obtained adequate transcendence from his experience (i.e., to be distant from one's story yet still be connected to it), he can then find creative ways to relate to his story; thus, helping to integrate the trauma into his life context and identity. The role of an empathic witness is implied in both the increased capacity for differentiation and integration (Firman & Russell, 1994).

The Social Realm (Audience)

The trauma survivor has a story to tell and needs an empathic other to bear witness to his narrative. The role of others in bearing witness is indispensable in the recovery process.

Isolated from the shared meanings of community, the survivor frequently lives alone in his or her "traumatized world" of meanings (Jannoff-Bulman, 1992; Lifton, 1979; McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Unfortunately, the path commonly taken by the trauma survivor excludes sharing with another person(s). He or she tries to bear witness to his or her *own* experience in order to make sense out of it. This solitary effort eventually proves insufficient and the survivor resigns himself to chronic levels of distress due to the unresolved havoc wreaked by the trauma on the individual's psychological life.

The alternative to relegating the trauma narrative to the personal realm is to make use of an audience. In this way, the explanation of what happened is shared with an empathic witness. The trauma story is shared to another who tries to understand it on the many levels on which it is told. For everything shared, there are many other aspects of the story--some very significant--that remain untold by virture of the fact that we cannot be aware of everything at once (Andersen, 1996). Attention is always a selective process and the good listener will attend not only to what is said but to what is omitted as well.

This witness also allows for both the incoherent quality of the trauma story typical in the initial tellings and the intense affect that accompanies the telling. The trauma now becomes transformed in such a way that its residence changes; it now resides *in-between* the two (or more) people in dialogue in an effort to create a shared reality. Placing the trauma onto the shoulders of two or more people eases the weight of the experience felt by the survivor.

One never tells the trauma story once-and-for-all, but rather, the trauma story will continue to be told throughout the life-span. Although trauma will always continue to be a part of the survivor's life, how one remains in relation to his trauma varies greatly. For example, one can be in relation to his trauma through ongoing disavowel of it, or, one can be sensitive to his trauma as themes are triggered and further processing or meaning making occurs. This later way of relating to trauma is more complex and therefore more advantagous. If one can foster higher levels of differentiation and integration in relationship to his self (and his trauma), he will be more able to adapt to the changing demands of life.

The telling of the story (and different parts of it) will occur again and again throughout life as new awareness, increased complexity and novel life experiences take place. Each telling of the story achieves greater differentiation and integration, not just to the story itself, but to the self-organization of the individual. For

example, the dynamic interplay between direct experience and explanation become fluid and synchronous with each other.

The process of retelling the trauma narrative and experiencing greater differentiation and integration fosters greater complexity (i.e., adaptive abilities) in the individual. One enters into a better relationship *to* his or her trauma story. The trauma experience becomes *part* of the survivor's life and self-organization, rather than consuming great amounts of survivor's emotional energies and cognitive resources (i.e., conscious and preconscious preoccupations).

The Cultural Level (Competing Intelligibilities)

The cultural level consists of broad cultural knowledges, dominant discourses favored by each society, politics, historical events and themes and preferred intelligibilities/grand narratives. White and Epstein (1990) explain how stories that deviate from the dominant cultural stories are met with a "normalizing gaze" intended to silence them. McNamee (1992) describes how crisis literally means "to separate." Trauma separates the survivor from his or her interactive communities, and by doing so, it creates a boundary that isolates. In this way, trauma is viewed as a "boundary experience." This is problematic, for humans need to bring their shared meanings into the public domain and negotiate them there (Bruner, 1990). Without shared meanings one feels estranged from one's culture; his or her meaning making and meaning using processes are what connect him or her to culture. In fact, "our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation" (Bruner, 1990, p. 13).

The premises that are maintained on the cultural level can deter prospective helpers from being the audience which the survivor of trauma needs. The grand narratives of psychology--which are given elevated status in many cultures--have

difficulty bearing witness to the trauma survivor when they are based on self-contained individualism, denial of political and/or moral content, denial of historical contexts and cultural influences (Cushman, 1995). Additionally, the modern proclivity to view the natural sciences as models for all forms of inquiry can foster an over-reliance on quantification, objectivism, ahistoricism and technology (Chessick, 1990); all factors that can limit empathy.

To summarize, individuals are multiply embedded meaning makers. The individual is first embedded in a particular culture (i.e., the cultural realm) at birth: "the symbolic systems that individuals used in constructing meaning were systems that were already in place, already 'there,' deeply entrenched in culture and language" (Bruner, 1990, p. 11). Bruner (1990) likens the seminal and constitutive role that culture plays in one's life--starting at birth--with walking on stage into a play whose enactment is already in progress; a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts one may play. Ironically, however, although this is the first and most pervasive and influential context of the individual's meaning making processes, it is the last to be fully recognized and appreciated. In the words of Gadamer (as quoted in Chessick, 1990), "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. . . . The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life" (pp. 261-262).

When the child is old enough and capable of forming his or her own identity, the cultural, historical, and relational sources that went into that identity are frequently overlooked. The degree to which an individual is conscious of his or her embedded nature can be placed on a continuum ranging from virtually no awareness, to very high awareness, of contextual embeddedness.

The Need to Address the Multiply Embedded Nature of the Vietnam Veteran in the Treatment of Traumatization

The findings of this research support the hypothesis that the veteran needs to tell his story in order to heal from his postraumatic stress reaction. Conceptualizing trauma as a multiply embedded event historically situated means that the study of trauma needs to be cognizant of contextual factors. Each of the three contextual factors (i.e., the personal, the social and the cultural) have the potential to silence the survivor.

The Vietnam veterans experienced a discontinuity in their life story. They all were accustomed to their life prior to Vietnam. After Vietnam they felt fragmented, as if their personality consisted of irreconcilable dichotomies. When they returned home and began to tell their story, they found society was not interested in listening. They saw how the prevalent cultural stories--many of which were inaccurate[4]--were projected onto them and they felt silenced and betrayed. These factors all come together in the Vietnam experience and all need to be addressed in the recovery process.

Training Therapists

This study suggests implications for training psychotherapists who are interested in trauma therapy. First, the therapist must be sensitive to the multiply embedded nature of trauma. The survivor must address the trauma narrative as it manifests itself on the personal, social and cultural realms of meaning making. The therapist must be proficient at recognizing the more obscure social/political/cultural factors that silence and/or embed the survivor.

Second, the prospective trauma therapist should avail himself or herself of the advice given by the veterans (taken from Chapters 5 and 6) to those who seek to help them (Appendix H). This material addresses many important issues germane to trauma therapy including: optimal therapist attitude and presence, characteristics of healing dialogue,

therapist actions that facilitate disclosure of painful experience, necessary character attributes of therapist which promote trust in the therapeutic relationship, covert behavioral signals given by the survivor that are important to note, pacing of treatment, etc. This information is far-reaching in its scope and wisdom.

Third, a collaborative relationship needs to be sought between therapist and survivor. Collaborative therapy attempts to emphasize "teleonomy" rather than "teleology" (Mahoney, 1995). Teleology refers to "movement" in psychotherapy with directionality determined by an explicit direction or destination, specific goals and the therapist as a "map seller[5]." Teleonomy refers to movement that reflects directionality that is *not* defined by an explicit destination but by an ever-evolving and dynamic interaction between a system (i.e. the trauma survivor following his or her "map" to find recovery) and its changing medium (i.e., the actual "territory"). In counseling that emphasizes teleonomic directionality (i.e., counseling that appreciates these dynamic, complex, self-organizing and evolving aspects of human lives), there is a respect for the power and continuing contribution of novel experiences as they challenge otherwise old and established patterns of experiencing self, others, the world, and the possible relationships among them (Mahoney, 1995). Telling and witnessing one's story introduces novel experience to the survivor. Counseling for trauma survivors needs to respect and facilitate the survivor's teleonomic activity.

Fourth, the trauma therapist needs to focus on the process of the client's moment to moment experience (and meaning making). Kegan (1982) distinguishes among a therapeutic response to the situation (e.g., the meaning that is made), the interpretation of the situation (e.g., the interpretation of made meaning) and the experience of the situation (e.g., the experience of meaning-making). It is the later that needs to be accentuated in trauma therapy, since traumatic experience halts the meaning-making process. Recovery from the experience requires that his or her meaning-making process is "re-animated" (Lifton, 1973). To emerge out of the overwhelming and engulfing experience, the survivor needs the therapist to be *with* him (or her)--not ahead of or behind him--as he struggles to

construct meaning. This places a demand on the therapist to be present in his or her witness.

Fifth, questions of therapist readiness as well as self care become paramount in trauma therapy. This study can be viewed as an evocative calling to the profundity of empathy. There is enormous support in this study for the therapist to be empathic. How do we know when a therapist is ready and able to face the abstruseness of devastating horror committed by self and others? When is someone ready to be there, moment-to-moment, when that is the task? How do we know when anyone is ready for making meaning of experience that is so full of atrocity and yet be able to face it with empathic comprehension? Here are some responses to these questions.

The therapist must be willing to be vulnerable in the therapeutic relationship. The empathic witness is very affected by the trauma story that is shared. Empathy requires the therapist to feel much of what the survivor is feeling. These feelings are often immense, conflicted and ambivalent. At times, hope can seem distant and must be reaffirmed in creative ways to prevent despair in both survivor and therapist. One way the survivor knows the therapist understands him is by the impact the story has on the therapist. The survivor's sense of agency is reinforced when his story impacts the witness. An anecdotal story illustrates this point.

In a prior counseling position that allowed me to work exclusively with Vietnam veterans struggling to recover from PTSD, I took walks in the woods after intense therapy sessions. I found solace in the peace nature afforded along the trails that dissected the woods behind the state hospital. I found out from several veterans, once we were well into the therapy, that they noticed me going into the woods after sessions dealing with atrocity. They knew I was affected by their experience, and with that knowledge, they began to trust me with their story.

The prospective trauma therapist must be willing to have her own issues touched upon in the course of trauma work. She must then attend to such experience--*in addition to*

the client's experience--in an ethically expedient manner. The extent to which the therapist has told *her* own story and felt empathically heard will be important, since the therapist's own developmental history is likely to be re-visited in the process of witnessing.

A secure context is needed for the witnessing therapist as she risks herself in the empathic understanding of atrocity. The extent that her current work environment consistently offers opportunity to tell her story *as a helper* is vital. The helper needs a holding environment, just as the survivor does. The responsible therapist seeks out kindred spirits to continually witness her story, thereby staying open to experience; both her own and the survivor's.

It is feasible to conceive of a training program for those intending to work with survivors of trauma that is modeled after the process I used in this research. For instance, the learning therapist could be asked to center on an instance of great pain for himself. He could then be "interviewed" regarding how it affected him and if he told others about it. If he did disclose his his experience to another, did he feel deeply understood? He could be asked how the experience affected how he views his life prior to the event, and, how he relates to the experience today. He could be invited to talk about how the experience changed him. He may want to share how the challenge affected his ability to understand others. If the learning therapist would rather discuss an instance when he bore witness to someone else's agony, instead of sharing his own experience, this is also acceptable. He can discuss what witnessing was like for him and in what ways it changed him.

This training method moves the learning from the intellectual to the experiential. Trauma therapy training requires experiential training (in addition to the theoretical training). This process may be a good measure of readiness for the prospective trauma therapist. If the student cannot do it for himself (i.e., go through the process of sharing and witnessing his story), should he do it for another? Has the student addressed his own pain adequately to meet the challenge of bearing witness to another's? This is an important question that needs to be answered for one considering trauma therapy.

A therapist's willingness to be impacted brings another issue to the forefront of trauma work: self care. The prospective trauma therapist needs to know how to deal with the impact of witnessing a survivor's story upon himself. If he is willing to be vulnerable, then self care becomes critically important. What do we know about taking care of ourselves so to remain open to the survivor's experience and not suffer burnout? When the helper stops facing his pain and vulnerability, therapy becomes stymied and obfuscated. The survivor is frequently treated in mechanistic and perfunctory ways by the overwhelmed therapist. The survivor feels distant from his therapist and is apt to believe he has done something wrong by expressing his pain, judging by the therapist's reaction of closing down (i.e., withdraws from joining the client experientially) and taking shelter in the intellectual realm of theoretical formulation. Self care prevents this outcome and enables the therapist to witness the client's experience as well as his own.

Future Research

This research contains several limitations that future research can overcome. First, there were no women Vietnam veterans (i.e. nurses). Research that includes their story would be very rich and have much to teach society as revealed in Perri (1997). Second, the spouses were not included in the interview pertaining to the veteran's life after Vietnam. Including significant others in this interview might illuminate social construction of meaning and family narratives that embed the veteran's life. Third, this sample of four veterans is a relatively small sample. The justification is that this study is a pilot study designed to test the merit of this methodology. A study that replicates this one and involves more veterans may yield additional information.

Fourth, future study needs to understand why the veterans found group therapy to be a disappointing experience (i.e., not helpful). Some clues may be found in the fact that the group experience in *this* study was more meaningful and valuable to each participant than they expected it to be. The group session which occurred here was designed to give the veterans the authority over group sharing. I devoted my effort to witnessing their

experience. As convener, I acted to ensure there was no doubt that my complete effort to understand their stories was being offered. The result of my witnessing effort seemed to foster a spontaneous willingness to tell their story. Based on this outcome, the question that future research needs to ask is: what is going to make it possible for the survivor to tell his or her story and know it is going to be witnessed? This study benefited by the use of profiles that facilitated the act of witness and increased the possibility of being deeply understood before the group even convened. Research that seeks to understand ways to help trauma survivors--in the context of group milieu--tell their story and *know* they are empathically heard is critical in making group therapy a viable mode of treatment.

Fifth, the use of this methodology would be important in understanding how social construction of meaning would be different or similar across other traumatized populations. A few caveats need to be offered regarding the term "methodology." First, the methodology as used in this study is the vehicle and not the substance of empathic comprehension. The substance concerns the need for empathic witness in the recovery process. The methodology serves to facilitate the witnessing effort; however, no methodology, technique, or structure can bear witness. Only another human being who is genuinely in relationship can bear witness. Second, the entire process must be kept intact. If the study is replicated, it is imperative to use the whole of it in the replication. The synergistic interaction of *all* component parts--the empathic understanding of witness, the courage of the survivor to be honest, the co-generation of meaning, the collaborative spirit of cooperation, and the simultaneous appreciation of the personal, social, and cultural contexts--produced these results. To isolate variables in future replication efforts will run the risk of decontextualization, of missing the "forest" through the "trees."

The veterans told us that they were helped by understanding their traumatic experience as a multiply embedded event. If the structure of the study is separated from the character of the witness, the results will likely be different. Just as an organism needs all its parts to be alive, this study needs to needs to remain intact to ensure its ability to foster

healing. Any use of piecemeal knowledge, exclusive emphasis on the biological, psychological, sociological or cultural elements of PTSD, or effort to isolate variables runs the risk of conducting iatrogenic treatment. Unless these elements are conceived of as secondary to empathic comprehension, and *not* a substitute for dialogue about making sense, then we make that person a patient for life.

Sixth, the *lack* of "resistance" in this process that dealt with excruciatingly painful material is noteworthy. The veteran's willingness to participate so fully in light of his history of being misunderstood, silenced, scapegoated and criticized is noteworthy. One possible explanation for this lack of resistance can be found in this study's emphasis on dialogical understanding which views resistance as contextualized within the "between." In other words, "resistance is the residue of an attempted dialogue cut short in mid-sentence" (Hycner, 1988, p. 125). Based on this definition, resistance is a product of the social construction of meaning generated by the dialogue and not solely a product of the veteran.

Resistance is understood to have the two valuable functions of self-protectiveness and wisdom (Hycner, 1988). I met the veteran at the point of his resistance and joined with the resistance through empathy. As a result, resistance--in the form of an obstacle or oppositional attitude in dialogue and relationship--did not occur. I conveyed a genuine and appreciative stance toward the wisdom of the resistance. They decided what to share and not to share according to their level of comfort in the relationship. There was a distinct absence of pressure or coercion on the veteran to tell more than he was comfortable telling and comply with a rigid interview structure. Further research that seeks to understand resistance as dialogical in nature, especially in regard to PTSD, would be valuable. Research that examines the positive attributes of resistence in the context of the survivor's post-trauma efforts to prevent retraumatization would also be valuable.

This research examines an extremely complex topic: Vietnam. Studying the effects of Vietnam on veterans clearly illustrates the relationship of history, politics, context, discourse, meaning making and identity to traumatization. I attempted to understand the

stories of the veterans in a manner that respected the inherent complexity of this topic. I found that theoretical frameworks that excluded either social or intrapsychic constructions of meaning were inadequate in fully understanding the veterans' narratives. In fact, the meaning construction in any one context (individual, social and cultural) is always interactive with the other two contexts. Thorough understanding needs to consider all contexts and how the contexts are juxtaposed.

Chronicling the traumatic wake of this war on the lives of these men saliently illustrates certain points. First, it provides helpers will a rare glimpse into the subjective experience of life affected by trauma. The phenomenological sequela of Vietnam for these men consisted of intense conflict, identity fragmentation, negotiation of incompatible contexts (i.e., warrior, citizen, sensitive husband, loving father, victim, etc.), and oscillating cycles of affective distress (i.e., rage, fear, apathy, loyalty, etc.) and numbness. Second, it looks at the healing effect of empathic witness on the recovery from PTSD. The act of bearing witness on the level of self (self-by-self), others (self-by-other), and culture (self-by-society) facilitates integration, complexity, identity coherence, tolerance of affect and creativity (i.e., transcendence). Third, it examines the deleterious outcome of being silenced by one's family, friends and society. Viewing trauma in the context of social meaning making processes--and dominant narratives--reveals how vulnerable the survivor becomes when no empathic audience is available. The frequency of both subtle and explicit forms of criticism sensitizes the survivor to public opinion which fosters a chronic level of guardedness--frequently manifesting itself through isolation and emotional distance--in order to feel safe (as well as keep others safe from them). Fourth, it offers hope for other survivors of trauma who seek healing. The men whose lives are depicted in these stories exemplify hope, courage, and tenacity. They have taken their wounds seriously and have pursued their recovery despite numerous obstacles. This process is testimony and documentation for celebrating the healing powers for all concerned--from the trauma survivor to his or her culture--that we find in the empathic understanding of true story.

APPENDIX A

THE PROCESS OF RE-ENTRY: MAXIMIZING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STRESSORS ENCOUNTERED IN VIETNAM[8]

If you were daemonic and powerful enough to want to make someone "crazy" following a war --like Vietnam-- how would you do it? If you wanted to maximize the negative effects of the stressors encountered in the line of duty in the war zone how would you do it? What would be the worst set of social, economic, political and psychological conditions you could create for the returnee?

First, you would send a young man fresh out of high school to an unpopular, controversial guerrilla war far away from home. In that war you would expose him to a high level of intensely stressful events, some so horrible and painful that it would be impossible to really talk about them later to anyone else except fellow "survivors." However, to insure maximal stress you would create a one-year tour of duty during which the combatant flies to and from the war zone, singly, *without* a cohesive, intact and emotionally supportive unit with high morale. You would also create the one-year rotation to instill a "survivor mentality" which would under-cut the process of ideological commitment to winning the war and seeing it as a noble and just cause. Then, at DEROS, you would rapidly remove the combatant from his foxhole and *singly* return him to his front porch *without* an opportunity to sort out the meaning of the experience with the men in *his* unit. Rather you would try to outprocess him into civilian status as quickly as possible. No decompression. No deprogramming. No readjustment counseling. No homecoming welcome or victory parades. Further, if you were daemonic enough you would make sure that the veteran becomes stigmatized and portrayed to the public as a "drug-crazed psychopathic killer" with no morals or impulse control over aggressive feelings. Then, too, by virtue of the selective service system the 21 or 22 year old veteran would be unable to easily re-enter the mainstream of society because he is undereducated and lacks marketable job skills. Thus, after the war he has to struggle to establish his

personal identity and to find a niche in society. Further, since the war itself was so difficult you would want to make sure that there were no supportive systems in society for him, especially among mental health professionals at VA hospitals who typically find his nightmares and residual war-related anxieties unintelligible. Finally, you would want to establish a GI Bill with inadequate benefits to pay for education and job training coupled with an economy of high inflation and unemployment. Last but not least, you would want him to *feel* isolated, stigmatized, unappreciated and exploited for volunteering to serve his country. If, then, you were to do all of these things you would surely *maximize the effects of war related stresses* and insure their prolonged deleterious effects in his life. Tragically, of course, the scenario depicted above was not fictitious: rather it was the usual homecoming for most Vietnam veterans.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interviews will consist of open-ended questions and prompting questions. It is hoped that many of the prompting questions will be spontaneously addressed in response to the open-ended questions. The actual phrasing of the questions will be flexible in order to respect the context and flow of dialogue.

First Interview	Length: 1 Hour

Review: What has it been like for you anticipating these interviews?

What was your experience of childhood and adolescence like for you as you reflect upon your life prior to Vietnam?

Family composition

1. Who was in your family and what was it like growing up in your family?

Relationships with parents and siblings

2. (a) How would you describe your relationship with your parents in childhood and adolescence? (b) How did things go with your brothers and sisters? If you did not have any brothers or sisters, how did things go with friends? (c) How would you describe your relationships with peers?

School experience

3. What did you think of school? What did you enjoy and not enjoy about school? What was your experience with academic achievement?

Significant childhood experiences and identity

4. (a) What childhood factors and influences were important in making you who you are today? (b) What were your greatest challenges? How did you overcome them?

Heard, understood and taken seriously as a child

5. (a) Did you feel heard and understood as a child? (b) Who was most attentive to your childhood stories? Who was least attentive? (c) Do you recall what it felt like to be heard and understood and what it felt like to be silenced and misunderstood?

The way they viewed their childhood and how they felt they were viewed

6. What childhood stories of you do *you* tell most often as an adult? Which childhood stories do *others* most often tell about you?

Predisposition to Vietnam

7. (a) Looking back, were there experiences that *prepared* you for Vietnam or perhaps made you more *vulnerable* to the effects of Vietnam? (b) What relevance do you think there is, if any, between your pre-Vietnam life experience and your personal experience of Vietnam?

Familial views and personal expectations of war

8. (a) What were *your family's* views on war and being a soldier? (b) What were *your* preconceptions of war and being a soldier?

Check-in: Was this talk okay for you? What stands out for you as you recall our discussion? What is really the most important aspect(s) of this period of your life?

Second Interview	Length: 1.5 Hours

Review: Do you have any thoughts about our last meeting or anything that has happened since then that you want to share? What was the experience of reading your transcript like for you this week?

What was the experience of being in Vietnam like for you?

Military service

1. How did you enter the military (i.e., drafted or enlisted)? Which branch of the Armed Forces did you serve under? And where in Vietnam were you stationed? How long were you in-country?

Relationships in Vietnam

2. (a) What was the morale like in your unit? (b) What was your relationship with fellow soldiers? (c) How would you describe the level of closeness that existed between you and others in your unit?

Intrusive imagery and recollections

3. (a) When you let yourself dwell on Vietnam, what specific images come to your mind? (b) Since returning from Vietnam, have you experienced any flashbacks of events that occurred in Vietnam? Any recurring nightmares?

Contrasting experiences

4. Name if you can, two experiences, one good and one bad, that stand out in your mind in relation to your Vietnam experience?

Most frequently told story

5. It is well known that talking about the Vietnam experience for many veterans is difficult. Nevertheless, think back over the years since Vietnam and recall what single experience you have talked about the most?

Learning and changing from the war

6. Life experiences, both pleasant and distressing, can teach us a great deal. Can you discuss how Vietnam changed you from the person you were when you first arrived in Vietnam?

Effects of time on meaning

7. What effect has the passing of time had on how your think and feel about Vietnam?

Check-in: Was this talk okay for you? What stands out for you as you recall our discussion? What is really the most important aspect(s) of this period of your life for others to understand?

Third Interview	Length: 1.5 Hours

Review: Do you have any thoughts about our last meeting or anything that has happened since then that you want to share? What was the experience of reading your transcript like for you this week?

What was the experience of returning home from Vietnam and re-entering civilian life like for you?

Returning home

1. Could you tell me what your homecoming experience was like for you? What did you need most upon returning from Vietnam and did you get it?

Being understood

2. In regard to your personal experience in Vietnam, did you feel both friends and family were eager to listen to your experience? (a) Who tried the hardest and the least hard to really understand what it had been like for you? (b) Did your experience of being heard and understood -- or lack thereof -- change for the good or the bad over time? If yes, could you describe the change?

Sharing and being silenced

3. (a) Have you discussed your experience in Vietnam with others prior to this interview? If yes, what have these experiences been like for you? (b) What percentage of your Vietnam experience has never been told? Why do you suppose this is so?

Relationships after war

4. Did Vietnam affect your relationships to family members and close friends? If yes, can you describe how it affected specific relationships? Which relationships were the most sustaining for you?

Making sense of Vietnam

5. Do you feel you have made sense of Vietnam on a personal level at this point in your life? (a) If yes, what was helpful or not helpful in this effort? (b) If you have not make sense of it, have you made peace with it? If no, what is standing in the way of making peace?

Change in self

6. Many veterans have said, "I went there as a young man of 19 and I returned an old man of 20." Does this make sense to you, and if it does, what does it mean?

Popular stories maintained by others

7. What are the perceptions that most people have about Vietnam veterans?

Receiving help

8. Have you ever felt as though you needed help with the effects of the War on your life? (a) If yes, what did you do about it? (b) Have your ever received counseling? If yes, what was that experience like for you (i.e., what was helpful/not helpful for you?)? (c) Have you found other ways of coping that have made a positive difference?

Imagining life without Vietnam

9. How do you think your life might have been different if you had never gone to Vietnam?

Maintaining mental health and hope

10. What do you do, if anything, to maintain your psychological health and well being? What in your life now brings the most fulfillment or hope to you?

Check-in: Was this talk okay for you? What stands out for you as you recall our discussion? What is really the most important aspect(s) of this period of your life for others to understand?

Fourth Interview	Length: 1 Hour

Review: Do you have any thoughts about our last meeting or anything that has happened since then that you want to share? What was the experience of reading your transcript like for you this week?

What was telling your story in this way like for you?

Reflecting on Vietnam in the context of one's life

1. What was it like reflecting on Vietnam *in the overall context of your life?* What impact upon you, if any, did it have?

New self-understanding?

2. Has this process of narrating your own experience affected in any way how you understand yourself and/or your Vietnam experience? If yes, how?

Inherent value in storytelling?

3. In your opinion, is it helpful to view your Vietnam experience together with life before Vietnam and life after Vietnam? If yes, why is it beneficial? If no, what would you recommend we do differently?

Degree of trauma integration

4. To what degree do you feel you have integrated Vietnam into your civilian life? Do you think that telling your story in this way was helpful to that end? If yes, why do you think it was helpful?

The impact of interviews

5. What impact has reading your previous interviews had upon you? Is there anything about your interviews that stands out for you, for instance a pattern or theme, or a meaningful insight?

The key message to helpers

6. What message do you want to give to those who professionally counsel Vietnam veterans?

Check-in: Was this talk okay for you? Is there anything that stands out for you as you recall our discussion today? What were the most important characteristics of this meeting today, and more generally, the entire research experience for you? Can you think of anything that was not included in these interviews that would have been valuable to include?

Group Interview • Fifth Interview	Length: 1.5 Hours

Anticipation of meeting others and sharing stories

1. What has it been like anticipating this meeting?

Experience of witnessing own story

2. What was it like reading your own profile?

Experience of witnessing others' stories

3. What has it been like hearing others' stories? Has hearing their stories affected you in any unexpected ways?

Unexpected similarities and differences

4. Is there anything surprising about what is common and what is different in your stories?

Value of sharing one's story

5. What is the value, if any, in sharing your story with other veterans?

Healing effects?

6. Has this process had any healing effect on you?

Addressing one another

7. What do you want to say to one another after witnessing each others' stories?

Check-in: Was this talk okay for you? Is there anything that stands out for you as you recall our discussion today? What were the most important characteristics of the group meeting held today, and more generally, the entire research experience for you? Can you think of anything that was not included in this interview that would have been valuable to include?

APPENDIX C
LIST OF CATEGORIES FOUND IN THE NARRATIVES

Andrew

Childhood and family composition
My father (and his expectations)
Adolescence, Marriage, and college
My first exposure to loss from Vietnam
Family composition
Sister who was also a Vietnam veteran
Childhood behavior and discipline
Time spent with father
School and socialization
Father's principles
Father's expectations
Being heard
Childhood story often told: Autonomy at young age
Preparation for Vietnam
Family views on war
Preconceptions of war
Things that stand out from this interview
Vietnam: Doing the right thing
Disillusionment
Vietnam; Looking toward the challenge of MAC-SOG
High standards and precision needed for MAC-SOG; You had to trust one another and work together
Loyalty
Nightmares: The young girl
Nightmare: man screaming
Retribution for taking the little girl's life
Stuck
Coming home different and learning not to talk
High expectations; the need for precision and intense camaraderie
Two Funny Stories
Learning and changing from the war
Homecoming
Impact on my family
Sharing trauma stories
Intrusive imagery
Society's judgment of veterans
Reasons for not talking about it
The benefit of talking at the right time in the right place
Talking about trauma
Homecoming
What I needed most upon returning home
Vietnam effected everyone there; you were very important
Reasons for not talking about Vietnam
The Vietnam Story needs to be reserved for the right time and place
Relating to my trauma
Maintaining my psychological health
What brings me the most fulfillment in life

Talking about the little girl
Impact on family
Supportive people
Bitterness
Spared from anti-Vietnam protesters
Making sense of Vietnam
Abrupt return to US without transferable skills
The Veterans Administration's treatment of Vietnam Vets
Receiving treatment
Maintaining mental health and hope
Vietnam remains a part of my life
Other veterans I served with
The effect of talking about my trauma
Participation in the interviews
Welcome home
What interviews taught me (it's not my whole life anymore)
The consuming nature of Vietnam
The motivation for seeking help
Homecoming experience was unexpected
Looking at my life before, during and after Vietnam
The lingering effects of Vietnam; Hypervigilence
Choice
Actively taking part--It's a different way
Message to professionals who counsel veterans
Future
Mandate for the Veteran's Administration

<u>Ernie</u>

Childhood
Family abandonment by father
Homelessness; poverty
Living with extended family
Beaten; humiliated
Abandoned by mother (repeatedly)
Responsibilities for younger siblings
Neglect and rejection; welfare; foster homes
Pleasant times
Witnessed abuse and silenced; no one to tell, no one to believe him
Shuffled about again; children separated
Parental alcoholism; overfunctioning as child
School
Family split up
Sexual abuse by a "friend"
No one believed me, no one heard me; Counseling experience
Work
Few memories of "good" times; lots of hard work
First heard of armed services; chance for a new life
Met father (and family) after several years of separation
Significant childhood experiences
Not heard or validated
Preparation for Vietnam but also a detriment in other ways (his need for acceptance)
Knowledge of Vietnam
Things that stand out from the interview (Desire to please, need for

acceptance, instability and being shuffled around, how he came to terms with his painful past)
Unsure if he's communicating clearly
His introduction to the military and how he ended up in Vietnam
Got married prior to Vietnam
Met father on route to Vietnam
Arriving in Vietnam and assignment (MOS)
Involvement with drugs and getting busted
Sudden end to marriage (betrayal)
Turning point; Stopped caring anymore
Impressions of people of Vietnam
Different philosophy of the people
From a cohesive unit to very low morale
Vietnam's affect on his sleep and concomitant hypervigilance
Telling his Vietnam story
Returning from Vietnam
Waste generated by war
Turning point: Involvement in politics
Effects of telling story in these interviews
Effect of telling story in interview
After Vietnam; Stayed in military
Alcohol and drugs
Second marriage
Striving to regain what I had lost in Vietnam
Did not associate with civilians
Assigned to Germany again
Re-exposed to trauma
Discussion of Vietnam among other veterans
Getting out of the service and betrayal; plans thwarted again
Dependence can only be found in God, not people
Employment after the military
Camaraderie after Vietnam
Making sense of Vietnam
Being changed by Vietnam; Seeking help
Prolonged post-Vietnam assimilation?
My identity as a veteran: Sense of not doing "enough" in Vietnam
Finding healing; Acknowledging and letting go of my past sense of shame and inadequacy
The value of having someone bear witness to your story
The effect of participating in the interview process
The message he wants to give to other professionals
Anticipating my future
Helping others
Anticipating the final group meeting
His greatest fear

<u>Glen</u>

Family Composition
Relationship to Parents
Relationships to Peers
College
Significant childhood experiences that contributed to his identity
Greatest childhood challenge
Relationship to Father

Relationship to mother
Feeling heard and accepted as child
Often told childhood stories
Preparation for Vietnam
Numbness and Vietnam
Breaking the news of joining the marines to his parents; His motivation for joining
Preconceptions of war and being a soldier
Joining marine corps
What stands out in interview
Military service in Vietnam
Relationships to others; Numbness
Return of feelings three years ago
Counselors
Humorous stories as well as painful ones
What its been like since returning from Vietnam
Awareness, affect and self-multiplicity and deception
Impact on children
Confrontation; Getting honest
Morale of unit
Humorous story
Trauma: Severely wounded in Vietnam
The importance of others in recovery
Two coexisting yet incompatible realities; The best and the Worst
Dedication to his men
Description of his operations
Training for war; No training for emotional ramifications
Unfinished business
Effect of the passing of time on how he thinks of Vietnam
What stands out from this interview
Other things that stand out from the interview
Necessity of war and coming to terms with it once it's fought; incompleted adolescence
Able to acknowledge emotions after years of disavowal
The story never changed
Therapeutic effect of telling story through writing
Survivor's guilt
Longing for his truncated adolescence
Re-entering civilian life and relating to peers
Coming home
Acceptance from father
What he needed most upon returning from Vietnam
Fitting in; Not being real
Restricting his associations to other vets
Making sense of Vietnam
Invaluable experience
Attending to your life (and honoring those who gave theirs) rather
than the injustice suffered
The importance of honor
The need for help and the reluctance to find it
Effects of society on him
From Vietnam to CIA
Postponing dealing with it
Military and feelings
Society's treatment of Vietnam vets
His career choice

Counseling
Facing his past
Relationships
Life now
Maintaining his well-being
What brings hope
Reflecting on the interviews
Value of honesty
Reflecting on this session
From trying to please to being honest and real
What stood out in reading his last interview
What was it like reflecting on Vietnam in the context of his life
His writing experience
Readiness for this project
Impact of Vietnam on his life
Value of reading his interviews
Restricting his social life to veterans; Being misunderstood by civilians
Message for those who help veterans
Hiding in a system
Value of maintaining a degree of openness in the interviews
Tragedy of "unsuccessfully" hiding
Sense of future
Finally told his story (via writing)
No future, only a past; The effect of over-learning how to be a warrior
Anticipation of final interview
Benefiting from the experience

Tim

Childhood family experiences
Description of childhood neighborhood and school
School activities and social life
College, activism & idealism
Disappointment in not graduating
Family illness (mother)
Brother
Relationship with father (intellectual one); Having a voice
Relationship to mother (emotional one)
Effect of an outstanding teacher
College interest and motivation
Impact of parents
Journaling
Religion, truth, civil rights, church, religious and philosophical questions
Interpersonal life
Being heard and understood
Funny childhood story
Racism
Experiences that prepared him for Vietnam
Perceptions of being a warrior
Father's combat experience
Parent's views of war
Brother
Preconceptions of war
Regrets

Stands out from discussion
Asset of a good family
Benefits of sharing his story this way
Making some connections after last interview; Irony of civil rights and Vietnam
Nature of Vietnam: Overwhelming
How entered military: drafted
Death of mother
Training
Going over to Vietnam
MOS
Worked closely with Vietnamese
Morale
Traumatic experience: Mick and Soldier
Mick's suicide after the war
Human side of his job
Returning from Vietnam and trying to be a solid citizen and trauma dreams
The role of writing in confronting Vietnam
Positive experiences in Vietnam
Mixed nature of good and bad in war
Relationships in Vietnam
Relationship to Vietnam
When it's time to deal with it
Relationships: Detachment
Writing and remembering (or failing to) the humorous times
What stood out for him in interview
What others need to understand
Reading war transcript on Veteran's day
Effect of participation in his life; Decreased tolerance for frustration
Coming home from Vietnam
Settling in, moving on
What he needed upon returning home
Talking about Vietnam
Caught in the middle
Others' perceptions of veterans
Society, change and the war
Talking about war
No supportive friendships
Vietnam lessons; People go away
Making sense of Vietnam
Effects of writing
Getting help
Therapists' behavior
Effect of being there: Change of self
Powerful, changing experience
Comparing his situation to guys in field
Maintaining health and cherishing life
Appreciation of moments in life
Would you have talked about it sooner
What's important for others to understand
Effects of talking today
What it's been like telling his story
Journaling his experience as it bubbled up
Effects of writing on making sense of war
Detached from experience

Telling your story in life context; why some never tell it (come to terms with it)
Degree to which he has integrated Vietnam; It's effect upon him
Impact of participating in the process
Key message to others: How to identify the problem and help the veteran to see it
Biggest problem: Emotional flatness
Telling & Writing

APPENDIX D
THEMES PERTAINING TO THE SUBJECTIVE EFFECTS OF LIVING WITH THE TRAUMA OF VIETNAM

Debt to be paid

> . . . There were more [distressing recollections], but I don't think they have a hold on me anymore. The one with the girl, if anything, has a hold on me. That's the one that still gets me when I'm sleeping. . . maybe because I had two young girls myself. I had one at the time. I don't know. . . . At some point it just got worse, it just got much, much worse! I was watching my daughter grow up and thinking to myself--this is mostly with my youngest daughter, Natalie--watching her grow up and thinking to myself that there's a balance of payment somewhere. I felt the same way with Catherine when she was growing up. I'm sure things haven't been easy for either of them having me as a dad. They might say differently, but I don't want anything to happen to either one of them. (Andrew)

Changes in life due to Vietnam

> . . . The person I was before I went, [and] the character I believe I have, I had *before* I went. The level of loyalty I have to those I care about was a result of being there. The appreciation I have for every day of life is clearly a result of being there. The pain and baggage I carry with me is a result of being there. What my family has gone through by having me as a husband and father is a great deal the result of my being there. There were a lot of years that weren't easy for them. I love them dearly, and they're the most important things in my life; but. . . they are casualties of Vietnam without a question; they're survivors of it. I've learned--it took a long time--my baggage shouldn't necessarily be theirs. And I think for learning that, I'm a better person, much better person. I know I'm a better husband. (Andrew)

> . . . Well I moved there as a young man of 22 and returned an old man of 23, I guess. I was a little older than the average age of people. . . . The experience is one that just really makes you age quickly. I mean you have to face issues, that most people don't face, suddenly. And [most people] don't have to try to at least resolve, in some kind of operational sense [the dilemma], "How am I going to continue to get up in the morning and put one foot in front of the other?" I mean that becomes a real issue when you're walking in the mine fields; it's *not* when you're walking on a safe sidewalk.
>
> So yes, you do a lot of--I don't want to call it growing up, but at least in a way [it is]--of resolving, in some kind of practical sense, issues that most people don't have to face suddenly. Most people neither face issues of life and death and the effects on them as individuals nor see the effects upon other individuals on a daily basis. You definitely *do* in that kind of situation. . . . With me, there may not have been anything happening that was really extreme, as much as there was for other guys who were out in the field (although we did have our occasions of extremity) But you just got to see the effects on a daily basis. (Tim)

. . . I don't know any other way to view it in the sense that while I was in Vietnam, I found myself comparing the experiences I had there to experiences I had had state-side. [I noticed] the radical difference between the two. It took, in some cases, the different perspectives just literally to stay sane in the face of what you were doing.

Since then, . . . for me at least, Vietnam seemed to become one of those kind of pivotal experiences in my life. It's very difficult to do anything in the way of critiquing my perspective on life post-Vietnam without thinking about how Vietnam affected that. I don't find myself able to divorce myself from my experience of Vietnam no matter how much I've tried for fifteen or sixteen years to do so.

. . . The question, "Why would you want to deny, forget, subjugate, push down [or] whatever the case might be, such a central experience in your life?" is part of what led me to write stories. It's obviously going to have had some impact in your life. It's got to have done something in terms of changing your perspective on. . .who you are *regardless* of your perspective of yourself. You are best not to just push that off to the side. You need to explore that; otherwise, you'll never understand who you are. And if you don't understand who you are, how can you start figuring out where you're going from here? (Tim)

. . . It seems since Vietnam, that in some ways, I'm not [as caring]. I have a feeling that has a lot to do with the experiences that I had in Vietnam. My mechanism for coping with those [Vietnam experiences] was just to almost shut myself down emotionally, in a lot of ways. It's like, "Don't get too close to anybody because they're going to go away." That's a little hard to deal with sometimes. I find myself still struggling with that. At least I understand what I'm struggling with more now. I think to that extent I've integrated the Vietnam experience. That has a lot to do with the writing. . . . I think there's a lot of guys who just don't understand that's part of the problem, in a way. (Tim)

. . . I would hope it would help others. I don't want to see kids go off to war, but it's going to happen. I'd go myself if I could. I think I've said it before, I'll break both my sons legs before they can join the Marine Corps. But then again, I don't know that I will; I doubt that I will. As a father right now, that's the way I feel because I know what war's like.

I know how a young person can be scarred by that; not physically killed or damaged, but just emotionally scarred, which in fact is actually even worse, because you're alive. [You are] living with your problem, and there's no one there to help you. So you're in a living hell. I've been there. Does that answer your question? That's why I'm here, I don't want anybody else to go through it. (Glen)

. . . I went over to Vietnam, a young naive kid. I left there older and wiser but still naive in many ways. I think that it grew me up in many ways, in some ways. But I still remained naive in many of the world's ways. So, I think it was like a right of passing. When I look at it, I wonder what I actually did learn. I always use it as a stepping stone. I use, "Yes, I served in Vietnam; I did this, I did that. I was there. I saw this; I saw that." I never expound on the bad experiences. I don't really talk about it. I don't know what being there has done to me, in all honesty. (Ernie)

No explicit symtomatology of PTSD the period after Vietnam

> . . . I spent a long time after that having no effects, I believed, from Vietnam. I lived kind of anti-socially, behaviorally, but I didn't see that I was having any trouble. It wasn't until probably 17 years *after* Vietnam that I started to have, what I call, night-time flashbacks. I started to get increasingly depressed because I thought I was losing my mind. Then I started with the weight loss [and] not wanting to sleep at night. (Andrew)

> . . . It consumed me at one time. It wasn't any part of my life, consciously, for twenty years. . . . And then for some reason, at that point in my life, my forties, it started. I started to dwell on things that were related to Vietnam. [I] started to look up old friends. I went to that reunion; and then I *dwelled* on it, I mean, every waking hour for months until it had nearly killed me. I think people have to be made to understand that. . . you need to make a healthy compromise. I'm not the answer now, I'm a patient, not the answer to how you do that. But you need some help to do it. I think. . . you go there [to get help] in their name [in the name of those who did not come home]. (Andrew)

> . . . But I felt like I had a lot of the immediate stuff to deal with anyway. That [Vietnam] was something that I didn't feel was having such an impact upon what was going on in my life, at that moment, that I needed to spend a lot of time going through psychoanalysis on it.
>
> So that was the only time in any formal the sense that I had really ever spent time talking with a counselor about my Vietnam stuff. . . . I think it was probably one of the things that got me to thinking. I'm a slow mover. . . I mean. . . this all happened about sixteen years ago and I really just started stories about six years ago. But I think that in that 10 year gestation period there was some [growing conviction], "Okay, this is gonna come up. I can put it off for a while, but this is stuff I'm gonna need to deal with for a while." Then there just became more of an increasing awareness that I needed to do that. (Tim)

> . . . [I needed help with the effects of war in my life] all the time. I didn't admit it to myself the first few years. As a matter of fact, I didn't think I had a problem the first few years I was back. Everybody else seemed to be troubled with this PTSD nonsense. I don't have a problem. . . . I didn't have a problem until things started falling apart. . . . [Then I started to think], "Well, maybe I do have a problem over this." I had an individual tell me the problem I had, and the reason why it developed so late in my life, was the fact I did not have to experience the on-and-off of coming back to the States in twenty-four hours ([being] in-country and then back on the block). The people that did that, usually suffered the problems much, much earlier. Since I was confined to a hospital for eight or nine months, I didn't have to deal with that. My problem was learning how to walk and talk again.
>
> Then I'm thrown back into society--going to graduate school--[and] there's not really a problem there as long as the long-hairs and . . . the communists stay out of my face. . . . There were a few Vietnam vets on campus, and we all kind of worked together so we all could get out of this. Our effort was mainly geared to school rather than remembering the war. Nobody wanted to remember Vietnam because nobody else did; and those that did, did so dishonorably. . . . I accept being forgotten but not

dishonored. So that's why it was not talked about. That's why I think I developed the symptoms and the problems so much later on in my life. And I had compounded it by forcing all of this down in my system and refusing to deal with it. When it came up, I refused to deal with it. (Glen)

Reticence toward discussing Vietnam with others with others

. . . I think I might not have talked about it for a while when I came back for those years. . . because I felt some bad feelings, like people used to say, "vibes" from people. And I think that maybe I thought I would not be able to control myself if somebody said to me, "We shouldn't have been there," or "We shouldn't have done that." I never had it said to me because I don't think I opened the conversation up enough to ever have it said. I don't know what I would have done because the memory [of those who died and] the value of the lives that were lost might have [caused me to] respond in more than [just] an antagonistic manner. . . . I'm glad I don't have to live with the feeling that I might have done something I shouldn't have. . . at the time. I don't know. But no one has the right to criticize unless you walk in their shoes. (Andrew)

. . . It's a unique experience, and nobody who hasn't been in any [similar] experiences is ever truly going to understand it the way you do. What's the point in talking about it with people? I didn't really try to talk about it with my family or friends, or anything like that. There weren't guys that I knew in the area because Worcester was not my home town. I had moved up here from the South. I didn't spend any time back in Virginia and see guys that I had known from high school or college. . . who had been veterans. I didn't have that kind of network up here at that point. There really wasn't much in the way of support groups either, inside the VA or outside the VA. After all, the war was still going on. . . . I'm not a joiner, anyway, of groups, so. . . . I think what I really wanted to do was just put it behind me, get some distance on it. So I guess I got what I wanted in a sense. (Tim)

. . . There weren't people up here, at least that I knew, that I really had much opportunity to share conversation with about that. . . . If I had started talking to you about my experiences and how I feel about it there, and you hadn't been there, first, I don't think you're really going to understand it, except in some kind of movie scene sort of way. Secondly,. . . I'm going to get pegged as this "crazy Vietnam vet" because there was a lot of that. I mean anytime anybody did something violent [you'd hear], "a former Vietnam veteran." Everybody just gets this picture of some kind of guy with a long-hair crazed look in his eye. I just didn't want to be associated with that. I was too busy trying to be a solid citizen. (Tim)

Feeling important and powerful in Vietnam and the transition back to civilian life

. . . You see, I don't know anybody that won't tell you this. . . . You had to change gears in such a violent fashion, or in such a large fashion. . . . And by that I mean, what we were in Vietnam; I don't care if you were an infantryman or you were in the 82nd Airborne or in the Marines. I don't care. It's not important. What you were is somebody who had an awesome amount of power. [You were] someone who was important to those people around you and extremely important to yourself.

I can only apply it to what I did, to where I was. A lot of people might have different views. . . . My feeling is that it was an experience where I don't think I could have ever felt more important in my life. And [then] to come home, go back to work and be a regular person again, was a let down! There's no question [that] I felt like I belonged there. And I missed the people there. . . . And [of course] there's a lot of things I didn't miss about it. (Andrew)

Effects upon family

. . . The pain and baggage I carry with me is a result of being there. What my family has gone through by having me as a husband and father is a great deal the result of my being there. There were a lot of years that weren't easy for them. I love them dearly, and they're the most important things in my life; but. . . they are casualties of Vietnam without a question; they're survivors of it. (Andrew)

. . . It's my own, and it's my problem. I don't need to give it to my wife, and I did. I did for a year before I went into the hospital. She shared it, and it wasn't her baggage. I think that it made it easier after that period of time in the hospital to talk about it. I still don't talk about it outside of the place where I should talk about it. . . . I didn't know it. I didn't know it. I think down deep I wanted Mary to understand me and give me the space I needed, . . . but I didn't want to come across with telling her anything that was bothering me. After the hospital, it was a little easier to talk about it. But you know, it's not something you sit down and talk about. And it's *not* something you sit and have a few beers and talk to somebody about. That's bullshit. . . . You just put it where it belongs, and you drive on; or, you can get stuck in it for the rest of your life. (Andrew)

. . . I first began this limited peek into myself when my children were born, [actually] not until they were 18 months (two years ago). I began to realize that I was requiring from basic toddlers what I would require from trained Marines: instant obedience. I love my children, . . . then I'd get mad at myself for doing this because they're not going to instantly obey me. They don't know how; it's not their fault. Then I would berate myself severely for my actions toward them, and it became a vicious cycle. Little by little I spun out of it to where I could look at it from the outside, as an outside observer, seeing what a mess I had made of my life because of this. (Glen)

. . . I've blown two marriages. I think the first one was mostly her fault [and] partly my fault. The last one was primarily, I'd say, 80 percent because of what I couldn't give. I couldn't express myself, I couldn't show feelings, I couldn't show emotions; therefore, I could not show love, or tenderness, or affection. I could imitate it; I'm a great chameleon. I've been doing that for a long time. . . . If it's not the real thing, it looks good on the outside, but . . . the feelings not there. (Glen)

. . . It would have been impossible [to write the book when with my former wife] because I couldn't have cried in front of her because we weren't close. I couldn't experience the closeness, then. I was always [at] arm's length. I would not allow anyone to see me because I was afraid if they saw me, they'd either be repelled by the repulsiveness that was there, I

thought was there, or [they'd see] I was something other than what I thought I was. I would not let anyone see the real me; that's why I became such a good chameleon. (Glen)

. . . I still feel detached, even from my wife and my kids. . . . Don't get me wrong. I love them and . . . [if] something happened to them I'm not sure how I'd react to it. Although I know that a part of me would expect it in a way, because everything does go away. Something's going to happen to somebody sooner or later. I still feel that certain amount of--if nothing else--philosophical detachment or even emotional detachment from people that are close to me. . . . I think I just learned to understand and accept that better in some ways. (Tim)

Staying *in* relationship to Vietnam

. . . I think it [one's Vietnam experience] belongs *with* you and not *behind* you. You don't just drop it in the road behind you. You carry it with you and you look at it when you need to; when it's good for you and when it helps you. I don't know if I practice what I preach, [but] I'm trying, I'm trying. . . . I close the door totally on it unless I'm in the therapist's office or I'm talking to somebody I'm close to, [like] one of the guys that I've kept contact with. (Andrew)

. . . I think I've come to grips with what is; and I think it's an insensible situation with a *non-sensible solution.* The only solution is to learn to live with it, to live with what you did over there, and [to] not make it such a big thing that it overwhelms you. Don't make it a pit you keep falling into. . . . It's an experience; it's only a *part* of your life. If it's a big part of your life, then that's what it is. I can't picture there being many parts of my life that could be more important to me. But it's not my whole life. I'm made up of a lot more things than that. Unfortunately, there's a few pieces I still drag around with me. But that's life. . . I'm a big boy; I can handle it. (Andrew)

. . . In some ways I feel closer to it [Vietnam] now than [I did] a year or so after I first got back, in the sense that I tried to push it away for a long time when I first got back. It was like: "that was then, this is now. You can move on." It was only when I realized that I hadn't brought it to some kind of closure and it hadn't gone away, that I literally tried to back up again and started almost in the sense of re-creating it by writing stories.

So in many ways I feel closer to the experience of twenty-five years ago than I do to the experience of five years ago or ten years ago. So I mean at first it was a matter of wanting to push it away, wanting to move on and then realizing that . . . it was still there, and that it was undermining me if I didn't confront it head on. It was just going to keep doing that, and so I just literally recreated it, in some ways, which has been helpful. (Tim)

Nightmares, flashbacks and intrusive imagery

. . . Basically, it [talking about Vietnam with other vets] depended on if I was drinking or if I had been in that mood. . . . But I just didn't feel like talking about it to any extent. I think . . . the thing that happened to me with that little girl, I don't think I wanted to discuss that with anyone until the nightmare of it got so bad that I lost all that weight and ended up

hospitalized. [I thought,] "Well, what am I going to the hospital for? Sorry, I don't know where the dream starts and ends and where my life starts and ends." So you have to talk about it then, because that's a problem. (Andrew)

. . . My therapist says, [I'm] kind of stuck on it. [I'm] kind of stuck in that. I've got to put it the way it is. . . . I lost 40 pounds before I was hospitalized, and I was afraid to sleep at night for fear of getting stuck in this dream again--either one of them, but it was mostly the one about the girl. And then I had a dream about. . . [when] I shot the jaw off--I don't want to dig that up again. That's just a visual thing, pretty ugly, pretty ugly. A lot of it is pretty ugly. (Andrew)

. . . I spent a long time after that having no effects, I believed, from Vietnam. I lived kind of anti-socially, behaviorally, but I didn't see that I was having any trouble. It wasn't until probably 17 years *after* Vietnam that I started to have, what I call, night-time flashbacks. I started to get increasingly depressed because I thought I was losing my mind. Then I started with the weight loss [and] not wanting to sleep at night. (Andrew)

. . . [There are] two dreams that probably have plagued me for the last eight years. I went sixteen years without nightmares and dreams. (Andrew)

. . . I can't say that I was troubled as others I've heard of, at least, I wasn't aware of it. I have had nightmares, but everyone seemingly has nightmares. The nightmares I have had concerning Vietnam were indeed nightmares, but [they were] not that frequent. I have heard various individuals . . . [who were] getting a little upset with me, [say], "I don't know what you're talking about in you sleep. Please shut up. I'm going home." . . . So I guess I do kind of remember [in my dreams], but I'm not aware of it. I think that mentally, for whatever reason, [because of] a safety valve perhaps in my well shut-up brain, I do not remember a lot of the nightmares. As a matter of fact, I do not remember my dreams. Obviously, we all dream whether we remember it or not. . . . It's like one part of my subconscious totally for my benefit, closes itself off from the conscious. [It's] like [it says], "We'll deal with this here in the subconscious, but as soon as he wakes up [we are] shutting down." (Glen)

. . . The first two or three years I was back, I'd have dreams about this. The dream was always me in the dark and the muzzle flash; the guy [is] in front of it, then the guy's not there sort of thing. Or . . . the picture of Mick jerking back and sitting down hard on the sand . . . just snatches like that. I knew what all that was. I mean I had other dreams too, based on other instances when I was there, but that was the main one. It was just kind of a recurring flashback of that. I didn't go talk to a shrink or anything. I knew what was happening, I guess, in terms of that. . . . I figured . . . you just don't forget this stuff. I figured it was something I was just going to have to deal with. My way of dealing with it, for the first seven or eight years I was out of the service, was just trying very hard to be a solid citizen. (Tim)

. . . The picture of a woman and a little girl. I'll never lose that picture and the picture of Mick sitting down hard on the sand. Most of my

life reoccurred to me in a form of candid snapshots, . . . like muzzle flashes almost. Just going along through your life doing whatever you're doing and all of a sudden there's this flash. . . . I suppose that's kind of a flashback I have, in a way. It's just like family album snapshots. . . . The things I've talked about tonight are things I have been thinking of. I mean they've been very sharp in my mind. I have sharpened [them] even further from there as I've been writing them down in the last four or five years. So tonight really didn't have any surprises in that sense I guess. I mean it's as if they were there and they happened yesterday. Not that they've always been that way. It's like retouching a photograph by writing them [my stories] down over the last four or five years so it's just much sharper. (Tim)

. . . Most of my stories will grow out of some kind of, what I call, *snapshot:* my friend sitting down hard in the sand after he's been shot, the little baby coming in with it's foot hanging by a thread, the girl through a chain-linked fence. . . . What I think happens is that I came back with this photo album of snapshots. I think what I did for a long time was just [say], "Okay, let's take this photo album and stick it up on a high shelf somewhere or underneath the bureau," or something like that. But then what happened is. . . that technique doesn't really work because the photos are obviously just inside you. I found over time that they just [on their own initiative] started a slide show. They just started flashing up a little bit more frequently. But what was happening was that you get *fixed* on the snapshot. . . and it sort of freezes. It's like a frozen moment in time. So if all you do is keep running the slides through and seeing these frozen moments in time, then it freezes you. And [then], you don't have that ability to work in any protean fashion from this snapshot to that snapshot through some other snapshot. (Tim)

. . . Outside of this room right now, there's a helicopter flying. If you listen, you can hear it. Does that kind of answer the question? I don't have to see it, I don't have to have it fly by this room, it's a UH1B helicopter. There is no other helicopter that sounds like it. That's it right there. So how has it changed? I bring certain things with me; they stay with me, no matter what. I don't travel and return [via] the same direction going anywhere. So the military will always be a part of me. I don't sit around and watch war movies. I've never done [that]; I won't do [it], and I don't look to torture myself. But there are certain things [that you do automatically]; I'll give you example.

This therapist was talking to with my wife, and my wife said to the therapist. . . "One thing about him that drives me crazy is that he'll never go and return the same way. If he goes to my mother's house, which is two miles away, he'll go one direction, come back another direction; and he'll mix them up all the time. I can't understand why he doesn't just follow the simplest route back and forth." She asked me [about it], and I said, "I don't know." I said, "Yeah, I do it, but I really don't know why." And she said to me, "You know, my brother was a Ranger, and he had a lot of trouble with Vietnam. We used to talk frequently. He would leave the house to go someplace, and he would go in one direction one way and in another direction another time. I would always ask him, when he's going to the end of the street, why does he have to go around the block? And he use to tell

me, 'Well in Ranger school they taught us to never go and return on the same route.'"

Well I don't believe I'm going to get ambushed, but old habits just don't die. I don't have hypervigilence about walking down the street or about going anywhere--I went through a little period of that at one point in my life--but it's [that]. . . some things stick with you. I'm incredibly loyal to those people around me. I don't like to see anybody around me hurt or in trouble. Some things stick with you.

I can be laying in a boat doing work, and I can hear a UH1B helicopter go by over Boston harbor. I can tell you in a second. There's no sound like it. There's no other helicopter that makes that combination of rotor blades, . . . it's size and shape and aerodynamics. . . . There is no other helicopter that sounds just like it . . . . So I stop; I look up, and I listen. There were times it use to bother me because I remember how much I use to strain for that sound. It doesn't bother me now, but I guess I took that with me from the military, as well as the fact that I don't go the same way twice. (Andrew)

Up until now, it was probably an on-going thought processes that required probably, I'd say, sixty percent of my thought--not conscious thought, not overtly conscious thought--but Vietnam was always in the back of my mind. Not so much Vietnam, but the emphasis of always sitting in the back corner of a restaurant, always facing the open area, [and] never allowing anyone behind you [was in the back of my mind]. Even going out walking through the lovely woods with a girlfriend, I couldn't enjoy because I'm always watching the area. (Glen)

. . . Sometimes loud noises, somebody popping a firecracker or stepping on a milk carton . . . the noises you can make . . . a sound like a gun going off unexpectedly, I can find myself ducking, dropping... It's an automatic thing. Even to today that's still a reaction. It just happened a few days ago. Some kids had some kind of a starter pistol. . . . I was delivering to this house. I was making a delivery in a box, and I looked over and glanced at this door. There was a window, and there was a gun pointing out at me; and I dropped, out of reaction. I looked in, and there was this six year old kid with a toy gun. (Ernie)

Avoidance of feelings; tendency to stay "numb" emotionally

. . . It also made it difficult from the standpoint that you rely so much on these individuals, yet you can't show the affection, or you don't want to; You're afraid to. You lose them, it hurts. Most of my unit are dead. I didn't have any problem there [since] I was numb emotionally anyway. It was just like I would see it, recognize it, feel it and then file it away for some other time. I couldn't afford the luxury of emotions then; there were other things to do. And if I did, I'd be a blubbering ball of tears and do absolutely nothing. Yes, it did numb the feelings of affection and whatever else. Feelings had to be stuffed so deep inside because if they came to the surface, you couldn't perform your job well. You had to separate emotions from the situation. They were mutually exclusive, actually. (Glen)

. . . I guess, [the separation of me from my emotions continued] until about three years ago. I was aware of the cause intellectually, and I was aware of the problem intellectually; but emotionally it didn't hit me until

three years ago. . . . Collide would be a better word [referring to the time when my emotions and intellect started to connect]. [It was] like two speeding freight trains on the same track, and I'm caught on the track and tied down. Yes, it did actually [catch me by surprise]. I wasn't fully aware of it until [I went to DC]. (Glen)

. . . The funny things, fortunately, have remained over the last 26 years, more so than the horror. If I think deeply enough, all of it comes back. I try and refrain from that. The funny things are indeed funny; it brings a laugh to anyone because of the absurd humor involved, and that's about as deep as I want to go. Sitting in a room with myself, I try not to think about it. It hurts too damn much. Yes, from a personal standpoint, [there is some value in keeping some distance by not remembering too much]. As I said . . . I do not want to be alone [with the pain] at all. . . . As I said before, I've only been aware of it in the last three years or so. So no, it has not always been the case [that I can deal with the pain]. . . . Early on, I would not allow it to come up; it was well hidden. [I] can't say [that I did] anything specific [to keep it hidden]. I just refused to allow it, period. That was it. It hurts too damn much. It's almost a denial. (Glen)

. . . But the beginnings of that outline, brought about stirrings of emotions and threads that required feelings. I hated to have feelings because to have feelings would mean that I was human. I didn't want to be human because I couldn't accept that: being human. All I could do was cry. . . . If I accepted myself as being human, all I could do was feel pain, the sadness of loss, broken promises, betrayals and whatever else. I'd prefer to be what I was; I could deal with that, that requires no feelings, no thought. But to be human, it requires a hell of a lot; it takes literally, a hell of a man to be a man. (Glen)

. . . I think some people do it because the experiences they were involved in were just so horrific [that] they are not ready to deal with the reality of it. It's kind of like what we were talking about before we turned the tape on, in terms of the intellectual perspective on your life. This would be the emotional perspective on your life. They [the Vietnam vet] may know intellectually that they were there and they did certain things. . . but emotionally they're not ready to deal with that. So they kind of push it down. Some people are probably pretty successful in doing so; although, I would question whether they really know themselves and are living their lives to the fullest as a result of not having dealt with that.

That's about the only reason I can think of why people would want to push something like that [down]. . . . I don't think that's something that is necessarily just [subsequent to] war experience. You could have had an experience of a terrible automobile accident, a rape, or most anything of a violent nature in your life. If you don't somehow come to terms with that *both* intellectually and emotionally then you're stunted. (Tim)

Feeling as if there are different "parts" to one's experience

. . . It's like one part of my subconscious totally for my benefit, closes itself off from the conscious. [It's] like [it says,] "We'll deal with this here in the subconscious, but as soon as he wakes up [we are] shutting down." I have to say it in that respect because, to myself, there's no other way to explain it. It's like there are two people inside of me, the conscious

and the subconscious, and they're both vying for my participation with them. One side understands the reality of the emotions and knows pretty much what it will do to me if those emotions are allowed fully to the conscious realm. There again, we're looking at multiple personalities almost. That's what I see it as. I guess that's the easiest way to deal with it. That's the way I can deal with it, personally. . . . Yes, [it's almost as if there are different parts of me that have been in different contexts] . . . . Yes, [the different parts don't always get along].

Recently, yes, [I've begun making peace between these different parts]. It's kind of all molding into one now, and I think that was [due to] the acceptance over the past very few years of what is reality. I think it's a milestone.

. . . I first began this limited peek into myself when my children were born, [actually] not until they were 18 months (two years ago). I began to realize that I was requiring from basic toddlers what I would require from trained Marines: instant obedience. I love my children, . . . then I'd get mad at myself for doing this because they're not going to instantly obey me. They don't know how; it's not their fault. Then I would berate myself severely for my actions toward them, and it became a vicious cycle.

Little by little I spun out of it to where I could look at it from the outside, as an outside observer, seeing what a mess I had made of my life because of this. . . . It was like being almost in an out-of-body experience with the exception I was still confined to an earthly realm. I was like an observer seeing myself do and say these things, yet being in touch with the emotions that drove those actions and sayings, and knowing the falsehood that was connected with doing and saying this. I was acting out something that was not really true. What was initially true was what I was not looking at or dealing with. In other words, I was throwing out something [that was happening] internally, and getting angry about that or doing something about it, but that instance had nothing to do with what my emotions were really upset about. . . . I was lying to myself, and I got caught by myself. I guess that was the first time I actually ever confronted this; when I caught myself lying to myself. I don't know how better to explain it, but that was the reality of fact to me. I was lying to myself.

Yes, I was [operating on two levels]. [There was] the functional outside level that society saw, that I was relatively intelligent [person who], could get around [with] no problems. Understand, I had no problems. Yet the other side of the fact [or the on the other level], I was a bundle of emotions, but I would not allow the outside to see that. [This side was] very internalized. . . . It was a boiler that was going to explode. There was no safety valve. (Glen)

. . . I was extremely angry at the system, and I think I still am. But it was a convenient target. I was angry at myself because I couldn't deal with real life. I couldn't cope; I was hiding. I became a chameleon, literally, I did [hide]. Whatever the situation needed as I perceived, that's what I became. I had no sense of self. I was chameleon. . . . I'm saying in the world, whatever could be done in the world, I falsely did. Whatever actions I thought people wanted from me, I did because the person that I was, was very angry, very stubborn and very hateful towards society that didn't respect us for having been over there in the first place. Yes, essentially [I protected society from me]. [I pretended to be someone that really wasn't me.]

[This went on for] twenty years, I guess. I've only just begun in the last three or four years to unravel that. I've been a paper mache' tiger for a long time, lying to myself. What hurts the most is I lied to myself. To hell with the rest of the world. I lied to myself by doing this, and I thought I was helping myself by playing their game. I could go away and laugh to myself and say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, they think they've got it on the ball. I know better," because I could see through this. Therefore, I allowed this to happen. But there was another part of me that would be so damn angry at this taking place. What I should have done was rung the person's neck and told him what he's doing wrong. But I didn't do that because society frowns on that type of thing. . . . You can't slap the boss around and tell him he's wrong; [instead], play the game. That's life in the states. It really bothered me because I was disgusting myself for allowing it to happen.

[Putting my foot down] happened over a period of time, almost like the book issue. It came out first blatantly, openly, and I wasn't ready for it. I closed it back in, [and] held it down deep inside where it was safe. Because I had no personality of my own, I couldn't go out into the world as myself. I didn't know who myself was. I didn't know what I was. I had played all these parts for so long; I was afraid of myself because I had all this anger stored inside of me. Once I say, "Let go" to the reality of what I was, what could I hold onto? What would happen? What would we do? I couldn't fly back; so little by little, I began to come out more, more and more. It's almost like the ground hog coming out of its hole to look around to see if it's safe or not. If I didn't feel they were safe, I'd stick back in and I'd play the part until, I guess, three or four years ago when it just kind of exploded. (Glen)

. . . I really find that a lot of my life is done with smoke and mirrors in the sense that I constantly feel as if I'm a fly on the wall watching myself live. There's kind of two *"mes"* at the same time. One is the "me" that's involved in the experience, and the other is the "me" that's on the wall watching me being involved in the experience. So I just don't seem to be able to see life without being able to see it from more than one perspective at the same time.

. . . Ever since, at least high school, it's just the way I am, I guess. I think that got sharpened a lot after coming home from Vietnam; particularly in the last five or six years [while] writing the stories about it. Why was it sharpened by Vietnam? It's just, in part, because I was that way anyway. I'd find myself standing around or doing something in Vietnam, and there would be another little part of me that would be the fly-on-the-wall saying, "Can you believe this shit?" I mean this is so surreal in some ways [that] the only way to maintain your sanity was to gain some other perspective [on it] at the same time it was happening. So I found myself doing that more while I was there than I ever had before. It's just kind of continued since then. . . . It seems to have just kind of happened that way, that there is some balance. Sometimes it becomes very skewed one way, and sometimes it becomes very skewed the other.

Obviously there are lots of times when I'm involved in some kind of experience and I'm not really as conscious of the fly-on-the-wall part as other times. Other times I'm much more conscious of the fly-on-the-wall than I am of my self participating in the experience. . . . It's like a pendulum; it will go back and forth, but it never goes so far out of balance that I become all one or all the other. It usually tends to stay in some kind of mid-range point. And I think if you got to the point where you have

swung the pendulum so far one way or the other [you would have problems]. On the one hand, if you swung it so far to the point where you just were totally immersed in your experience, you'd never be able to gain your perspective on your experience. On the other hand, if you swung so far the other way, [then] you spend so much time thinking about your past experience that you don't have any present ones. So I can see that you'd go crazy either way. . . . I don't mean crazy in a clinical sense, but, well maybe you could go crazy, I don't know. (Tim)

Opposite ends of the spectrum; the best and the worst, life and death

. . . [Just like] opposite ends of the spectrum; you have light, [and] you have darkness; you have life, [and] you have death. [It's] the same way within our physical world; you have the best and the worst. [The best and the worst] collided [in Vietnam]. I would say [it's] almost damn well impossible [for the average civilian to understand]. You almost have to experience it. I would like to be far more articulate in these things than I am--and I'm sure that there are people that are--but still, to me, you have to actually experience that. It's something you may emphasize or intellectually understand . . . but you will never *know*. That's about the only way, the easiest way, I can describe it. And you're right, it's the best and the worst, and it collided. War is like that. It's an unfortunate aspect of humanity. But you have the absolute best and the absolute worst of life in any one spot at one period of time.

. . . All of your senses are in full operation when you're in war; they have to be. It's an aspect of survival beyond what you've been trained which brings out those instincts (as well as honing them to specific areas). Plus the human animal is faced with life and death. So survival is based upon what you have learned, what you have seen and done. That is . . . you're there to survive first of all, then to do whatever job you have to do. But you have to survive. (Glen)

Survivor guilt; bring honor to those who never returned

. . . [It was a way of bringing honor] to them. Great people! They deserve it. . . . In the aftermath, you think about: what did they die for? Politically, it's had . . . great opposition; it still does. But to those of us that were there, there're great! . . . I've only managed to go to the Wall one time. I know too many names on the wall. Now I can go. It still hurts; I'll still cry. . . . It was time at that point when I began this project of the book. I was to let go . . . [of] them and the guilt that I felt because of their death and because I didn't die with them. . . . Surviving something like that with people you're so close to, and losing them on a regular basis, and being stuck with the responsibility of pointing your finger and saying to another one, "Go, it's your turn now." It was good to make peace with that. They did their job damn well. It's a necessary evil. (Glen)

. . . It's not worth it, it's not worth it! What happened, happened. You can't change that; but you have a life to live, you can change your life. The people you knew and loved, deserve to be honored [and] are honored. Those that don't deserve it, forget them; walk away from it. It takes time. It took me, God knows, at least twenty some odd years just to come to that understanding of a beginning. But it's so damn freeing. It's like day and night; it's wonderful, fun.

I'll never forget it. I'll never forgive some of the things that happened, some of the people that caused it to happen; but it happened, it's over, it's past. I certainly can't change history. The only thing that I can do is honor those who sacrificed [their lives] and honor them by improving my life since I'm still here.

Up until a very short time ago, I wanted to be with them. I was angry that I was alive--survivor guilt perhaps, yes, but I was angry that I was left alive. I think about the individuals that had so much to offer far more than I, to society, the world. They were killed. I just didn't understand it. And it would have been easier, obviously had I died with them. I wouldn't have to go through this. But it's not the case; I was saddled with that responsibility. The Supreme Commander decided otherwise, and I'm glad damn He did now, because I've learned.

I've learned a lot, mostly about myself, that I never knew even possibly existed. Life's wonderful. I still honor them immensely. I don't want to change places with them. I'll be with them soon probably, anyway. So when that happens, it happens. Until that time, I can best honor them by doing the best I can with what time I have left. (Glen)

Shame over feelings of not doing "enough" in Vietnam

. . . In looking back over the whole situation while I was still in the service after Vietnam, I felt that because I was not a ground-pounder, an "11 bravo"--that I wasn't in a fox hole or out beating the bush, as was thought of everyone else--I felt a little bit less of a soldier or of a contributor. But in looking back I feel I did what I was required to do. I just did my time the same as everyone else that was required to go. So I felt it was refreshing and enlightening, and it took a load off of me. (Ernie)

The complicated task of healing

. . . The human animal is a disgustingly complicated thing. I've learned that from my myself. I had come out enough to [the point] where I had consciously talked to myself and told myself how stupid I'd become in not getting this out; but then again, I didn't know how to. Where do you go? What do you say once you get there?

But it's a process. Like I said, being in combat is one of the most fantastic elevating highs you will ever have, but there's also the flip side: it's scary as hell! That's if you think about it. But if you're there doing your job, you find your mind is disassociated, the conscious mind is disassociated. You're operating on training and experience. So everything your conscious mind is doing is in the third person, almost.

When I was over in Vietnam, my conscious mind was like over here watching it all, but yet recording it all, because I could not record it. Where I was; I was a machine. I didn't think beyond what I needed to do to get the job done. Then I was stuck with the recording being played back after I got back like, "How will I deal with this?" I can't deal with this because it plays back all at once.

It takes time to sink into the depths of the animal you become in war. It's a process that the mind does not realize [has ended]. . . and it plays it all back and dumps it into [your consciousness] so unless. . . the interviewers know how to deal with this in reality and understand it for reality--not for what the book says--we're going to have screwed up people forever. That's why I think this [the interview process] is a very very good

idea because it's brought me to a clearer understanding of the problems that I was facing just trying to get this out to help some other veteran. Once the problems came up in our discussion, I was faced with the fact, you've got to deal with these. Fortunately I was already enough out, that I couldn't turn around and suppress it and say, "We'll forget about this." No, you can't forget. I know what it was like when I forgot about it and suppressed it. I don't want that anymore. Now we'll deal with this. (Glen)

. . . I know some veterans that have spent years hiding in the system. They have this problem, and they've been having this problem for 20 years. No one has ever brought it [their problem] out, so they continue to be a part of the system because it's comfortable. They don't have to tell the truth because interviewers never got it . . .because of the rigid structured system. [The interviewer] never picked up on what was said which was the key issue. So the veteran could hide, and believe me, we did! We're damn good at it. I spent 20 some odd years hiding, I know. I was a chameleon. I did that within the government structures. . . . My entire life I was living as a chameleon. Whatever I felt that they [society] wanted, . . . I'll give them, no problem. But it's a lie. The issue was never dealt with since no one touched upon the issue. If they did, I would overcome them with my "force" . . . and shut them down. I just would not deal with the issue that was the key to unlocking everything. (Glen)

. . . Everything I do [now] has something to do with maintaining my psychological well-being. . . . [In my past,] I never knew what it was [to maintain my psychological health]! I think I never knew what doing things that were good for me and not talking about things that were bad for me [were]; I never knew that. I didn't know any of that stuff. . . . I just did what I felt like doing. I worked a lot of hours [and] a lot of weeks. I took very little time off, and I just never gave my psychological well-being a hell of a lot of thought. I didn't think there was any place that needed a Band-Aid until it was almost too late. Now when I see what happened--when. . . I thought I was losing my mind. . . when I had that breakdown. . . .--it's like taking gravity away! You don't know where you stand. You don't know which direction is up, down, north, south, east or west. (Andrew)

Sense of loss, detachment and alienation

. . . Everything goes away one way or another. People leave each other. People die. Vietnam really reinforced that for me. I say *reinforce* because one of my father's favorite expressions was: "You raise your children to leave you." And what he meant by that was that, at some point . . . the children start making decisions on their own and there's not a whole lot you can do about it. They're going to take their own path. All you can really do is hope to give them a value system such that when they do start making decisions they will make ones that are good, whatever that means to them.

I mean I had friends that got killed. I saw people . . . that weren't friends [die]. They're there one minute and they're not the next. . . . And then my experience since then. I mean, I've been married and divorced twice. I've had friends die since I've gotten back . . . and it just kind of reinforces that "everything goes away" business. Somehow that kind of gets twisted around with this [other] saying: "You raise people to leave you." I find that since I've come back, I always feel the sense of

separateness. I know to some extent that's probably a self-protective mechanism because everybody does go away. Even with my wife and my kids I find myself almost as if I can be a fly on the wall watching me with them. There's a sense of detachment from them. It's as if we each kind of walk around in our own little cage. You can kind of reach through the bars and talk to somebody else in their own little cage, but you can't be in the same cage with somebody else. . . . All my life feels like *that* since coming back. (Tim)

. . . One of the experiences that Vietnam definitely taught me, in a very graphic sense, is that people go away; and they often do so very suddenly. But even if they don't [go away] through some kind of violent activity, death or accident or anything like that, they *do* go away. I mean children leave their parents, parents may separate, families tend to move further apart. . . friends go off in different directions.

. . . So when you put those two together, "People go away" and, "You raise your children to leave you," I found that I didn't feel any kind of emotional need to go and be with my father and my brother. [They were] the only living relatives I had left at that point. I didn't really feel much emotional need to go and be with them. I really felt more of an emotional need to try and settle in with in my wife and my in-laws and my community here, where I chose to live.

So there was a real. . . social discontinuity, and it was a familial discontinuity too, in that sense. But it wasn't anything then or now that bothered me. I think that's just because of my perspective. . . . I think John Donne is wrong: every man *is* an island. . . .We're all in our little cages and the closest we ever come to anybody is being able to reach out of the bars to somebody else who is reaching out [of] their bars. So I've always been. . . a loner in that sense. It didn't really bother me, nor does it really bother me now, in that sense. (Tim)

Efforts to assimilate back into society

. . . But my attempt to become a solid citizen lasted until about the time I was 31. . . . I think not too long after I turned 30, I just kind of woke up one day and wondered: "Okay, I've got the house and got the yard and got the dog and got the job and got the wife." And all that's okay, but it's nothing really special. And the relationship with the wife was beginning to deteriorate for lots of reasons. I just thought, "If this is it, I don't know if I want to fuckin' bother anymore." So I said that I've got to make some change. So I left the wife [which also implies] kind of leaving the church. . . . I'm on my third marriage at this point. We've been together, between living together and being married, 16 years now. So something's going right, I guess.

But I spent a lot of time then just kind of walking around talking to the trees, kind of just living a double life. [I] did more drinking than I should have. . . . [I] just kind of blotted things out for about eight to ten years. I mean I was never like a serious alcoholic or anything like that, but just enough to kind of mellow you out and take the edge off every place, sort of thing. [I] was always functional in terms of being able to hold a job, but this stuff was always back there, . . . the red edges and the bone sort of thing. About five years ago I figured I've got to deal with this because otherwise, I'm probably headed for an early grave, or, before the third marriage is going to break down or whatever. (Tim)

Difficulty handling frustration and anger

> . . . I had a bad day at work today and there was some confrontational kind of stuff. Whenever that happens to me, there's a part of me that just wants to "search and destroy." I tend to be somebody who speaks my mind. So I tend to have to hold myself in check. I've noticed in the last week or so that probably because with it being Veteran's Day and that particular session that I've just had [about discussing Vietnam]. . . things were close to the surface. I had to be more careful to keep my steel pot and my flak jacket on[and] duck and cover sort of thing. (Tim)

> . . . It's not that it [the interview] stirs up bad memories from the war or anything like that, but. . . thinking about those things, just the frustrating stupidity of that whole experience, makes my tolerance for frustrations in my present life lower than it would be otherwise. So I have to be a little bit more cautious about that. . . . I'm not a violent kind of a person but I can do real tongue lashings. So I have to be careful not to do that sometimes. (Tim)

> . . . And I think that maybe I thought I would not be able to control myself if somebody said to me, "We shouldn't have been there," or "We shouldn't have done that." I never had it said to me because I don't think I opened the conversation up enough to ever have it said. I don't know what I would have done because the memory [of those who died and] the value of the lives that were lost might have [caused me to] respond in more than [just] an antagonistic manner. . . . I'm glad I don't have to live with the feeling that I might have done something I shouldn't have. . . at the time. I don't know. But no one has the right to criticize unless you walk in their shoes. (Andrew)

APPENDIX E
THE DEGREE TO WHICH THEY HAVE INTEGRATED--OR MADE SENSE OF--VIETNAM IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR LIVES

Andrew

. . . It [Vietnam] changed my whole life. I was a young guy, and there was a war going on; and I thought that I belonged there. A lot of my thinking--I didn't realize until I was in Country--was a bit naive. But nevertheless, I'd probably do a lot of the same things again because I believed in what I was doing. [I] believed what I was doing was right. At least in the beginning, I believed whole-heartedly what we were doing was right.

. . . I still see a therapist every week, and that's where I take care of *this* business; in there. . . . I leave it there. My behavior has changed quite a bit from the bad days that I had from Vietnam, which was back four or five years ago. . . . It's much much better now. My marriage is as solid as can be. Mary, my son and daughters understand everything; they have been through all of this with me. I believe we are today a closer, more loving family, in large part because of the strength and understanding they have given me. And that's it. I don't dwell on it. I don't sit around talking about it with a few cocktails. . . . There are times to bring it up and ways to bring it up. Knowing that is part of maturing; maturing with *this* situation.

Glen

. . . On a personal basis "yeah!" I do [feel I have made sense of Vietnam]. I was in the Marine Corps, therefore I was under the authority of the Marine Corps and the President of the United States. I had a job to do. I was paid, trained and sent to do that job, period. I understand that. As far as the political ramifications of Vietnam, I'm only now understanding what a mess and screw up it was. I look at it with a half-smile and I [think], "You dummy, why did you go do that?" That's so screwed up because we didn't know everything then that we know now.

It was a different world when I was in the mid-60's; it's a different world. There was still some honor in the United States. You didn't allow things like this to happen or that to happen. You put your foot down here; you didn't allow this. Now, anything goes. That was disgusting in the war but, I'll have to say, I didn't know what I was going to get into. . . . I wouldn't want to do it again, but I wouldn't take a million dollars for the experience. Yes, I have [made peace] as much as I can right now, which is quite a bit. Actually, even those that know me are surprised, which makes me feel good. I've come a long way in a very short time.

. . . I still feel good. I'm proud of what I did. I wouldn't want to go through it again; and I think that I would actually, given the same circumstances, . . . the same mental foul-ups, I would try for it to *not* be allowed again. But we're looking at . . . a span of what 26-plus years, basically, a quarter of a century of a learning process here. So in one respect, I suppose time was on my side that I managed to live this long, so that I could see the difference.

But now I understand that, and I can enjoy life now. It's going to be considerably shorter than it was before [due to my war-related injuries], but it's different now that I can put all this nonsense behind me. And I understand it from the standpoint [of], "Yeah, unfortunately I was there. Things happened that were unfortunate."

I also see that . . . in order for me to get to this point, I personally had to go through all this other nonsense . . . to be here now. I couldn't have done it at any other point in time. It would not have been real to me. I had to accept all of the problems, all of the foul-ups, and deal with them and understand them in order to be here now.

So life is a constant process, even when its a pain in the ass. Much like a tunnel, the other end is over there; you have to keep going.

. . . Very very often, as I found out the last twenty-plus years, you can't relate to them because there's been a huge chasm created that neither one can bridge. That's why when you asked me before, 15 years ago I wouldn't even have talked to you. 15 years ago, I'd have laughed in your face, literally. "Go away!" [I would have said]. [I'm talking with you now because] I've changed.

. . . Having gone through all this nonsense, this hell, . . . there has been a learning process, and I've finally put it [Vietnam] aside. I felt when the subject was broached by you, [about] what you're trying to do with this, I wanted to be a part of it because I now could be relatively free to relate to someone, in some respect.

. . . What happened, happened. You can't change that; but you have a life to live, you can change your life. The people you knew and loved, deserve to be honored [and] are honored. Those that don't deserve it, forget them; walk away from it. It takes time. It took me, God knows, at least twenty some odd years just to come to that understanding of a beginning. But it's so damn freeing. It's like day and night; it's wonderful, fun.

I'll never forget it. I'll never forgive some of the things that happened, some of the people that caused it to happen; but it happened, it's over, it's past. I certainly can't change history. The only thing that I can do is honor those who sacrificed [their lives] and honor them by improving my life since I'm still here.

Up until a very short time ago, I wanted to be with them. I was angry that I was alive--survivor guilt perhaps, yes, but I was angry that I was left alive. I think about the individuals that had so much to offer far more than I, to society, the world. They were killed. I just didn't understand it. And it would have been easier, obviously had I died with them. I wouldn't have to go through this. But it's not the case; I was saddled with that responsibility. The Supreme Commander decided otherwise, and I'm glad damn He did now, because I've learned.

I've learned a lot, mostly about myself, that I never knew even possibly existed. Life's wonderful. I still honor them immensely. I don't want to change places with them. I'll be with them soon probably, anyway. So when that happens, it happens. Until that time, I can best honor them by doing the best I can with what time I have left.

Tim

. . . Just in the last, say, five years, I've been going through a stage in my life where it became more important to me to understand how the ripples that got dropped in that pond have spread out. So I've made some real conscious effort to, in a way, recreate it. So I've kind of gotten used to doing that so this was, because it's stuff that's freshly turned soil, it was much easier for me to do this than it was to do the first one [the first interview] in terms of dredging up substrate.

. . . I think making sense of anything in your life, whether it's Vietnam or anything else, is always an on-going process because we are protean; we change with our experience. Even writing a story and thinking you made sense of it, [this story] will then raise [and provoke] things that don't make sense. . . . So you have to write another story and try and make sense of that. But yes, it certainly helped [to] . . . sharpen my take on it in terms of. . . my perspective on my involvement in [Vietnam]. . . . I guess I'd have to say that, in at least a metaphorical sort of way, writing about it has helped sharpen my perspective on who I am and what my involvement there meant. . . . I think humans are very adaptable, and they can find ways to re-wire the circuit board and function without necessarily having made sense of the experience, particularly of a horrific one. But I think they cheat themselves in the process of doing that. And I ultimately I think it's going to be much more helpful to their self actualization, to borrow a term from Maslow, if they can somehow make sense of their experience.

. . . And each time [I write], even though it's about the same events (in terms of the trueness of it), the reality of it is a little different. . . . I find that my understanding of myself is continually re-evolving, not just from the facts, but from my successive perspectives on the facts. It's like Escher prints, the staircase thing. You go up the stairs and you go make a right-hand, you go up the stairs make a right-hand, you go up the stairs you make a right-hand, you go up the stairs and you're back to where you're started from. Well how do you do that? He's combining two different perspectives within the same picture and that's kind of what I find writing does for me; I wind up having the multiplicity of perspectives on my own experience.

. . . I think I've integrated it [Vietnam] pretty well. I think that part of that comes from having faced up to the fact, sixteen years after the fact, that [it was what] I needed to do for my own personal growth: to. . .very consciously. . . write stories. On the other hand, I know that a lot of what I learned. . . from the Vietnam experience still affects my perspective on myself and the world.

I'm not sure that I'm always happy about how it affects my perspective. I mean I do find myself in many ways very emotionally detached from everything around me, including myself. It has to do with the "people go away" business. This [Vietnam] sharpens [the "people go away" belief]. [I can identify this] in wondering sometimes, "How much do I really care about my wife, my kids, coworkers or friends?" I mean, if something happened to any of them, how much grief would I feel? How much trouble would I have dealing with those kinds of traumas, other than just on a practical level. . . . But see, even that's just, . . . it's kind of indicative of it. It's like, "Well shit happens, life goes on and who gets the

kid up in the morning" . . . . Some people would say that it is a really sick perspective to think about the fact that your wife may get smashed in an Automobile accident, but it's just one that's been conditioned from having seen so much death, I suppose.

So I'm not always really happy with the way I see things, and I still find myself struggling to try to find some ways of almost overcoming such a powerful lesson. Like [I think], "How can I get back in some ways to being the person, at least I think I was, prior to the time I went to Vietnam?" It seems to me when I was in high school and college that I was, in some ways, a more caring individual. It seems since Vietnam, that in some ways, I'm not [as caring]. I have a feeling that has a lot to do with the experiences that I had in Vietnam.

My mechanism for coping with those [Vietnam experiences] was just to almost shut myself down emotionally, in a lot of ways. It's like, "Don't get too close to anybody because they're going to go away." That's a little hard to deal with sometimes. I find myself still struggling with that. At least I understand what I'm struggling with more now. I think to that extent I've integrated the Vietnam experience. That has a lot to do with the writing.

Ernie

. . . As for how Vietnam affected me in my life, I look at it as if it was *part* of my life; it contributed, obviously. . . . I know that there's nothing I can do to correct what was done there. All I can think about is where I'm at right now. I can't worry about what happened yesterday or twenty some odd years ago. I can only worry about right now and this twenty-four hour period in which I'm in. I can't let that bother me. I'll do everything, I have done everything that I can to release that and let it go.

. . . That's where I am, and that's where I should be. The program has helped re-enforce that, and also religion has helped to bring that through. . . . Without question, that's all that can be required. We can't do anything to repair what's happened in the past. We can only live with where we're at now. How you deal with your wrongs, or with the people that you've wronged, is going to affect your future. The important thing is not to make those same mistakes in the future [and] to learn from them.

. . . Right now, as for Vietnam affecting me, I know that I've had to let it go. It was suppressed, and it's gone. I don't know if I could have done so well if I had written it down first. It may have [but] I don't know if it would have helped any more. But in being able to speak it like I've done here, I've found that to be as effective--I think more effective--[then writing it out beforehand] and I don't think I needed to write it down to re-enforce it.

. . . What does matter is that I feel good about what's happened. . . . It's important to me to maintain my sobriety because of the possibility of what I was trained to do. My biggest fear is the fear that I might hurt someone. And if I take one drink, it can lead to that inevitable problem of a blackout where I would do something and hurt someone. My biggest fear in the world is that I would actually reach out and hurt someone in anger because I would lose a little bit of control that I presently have in my life

that's caused through my sobriety. That is my biggest fear, that I would hurt someone with rage, with anger that would be out of my control because I didn't pay attention to my sobriety. That's why I grab sobriety; I hold onto it with both arms because I have that control in my life today.

APPENDIX F

MESSAGES THE VETERANS HAVE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO HELP

. . . [I think professionals who counsel Vietnam veterans should] make them take more of a part in what they're doing. Make them [or] find a way to get them [Vietnam veterans] to vocalize or to write it down or to talk about it. The hardest part is getting started. Be patient and make them take part in their therapy. (Andrew)

. . . I can tell you about Vietnam veterans. They'll be first *not* wanting to talk about it. I'm talking about the ones I know. They'll not want to talk to about it. They'll not want to blame anything on that experience, or they'll want to blame too much on that experience. . . . And then if you open that door, you have to make sure that you're there. You can't just take the rug out from under them and just leave them and tell them that you will see them again in a month. If you got a guy that has substance abuse problems, watch were he goes, watch what he does. What I mean by that is you open a can of worms, you get him talking about this, and if you don't monitor him to make sure he's going to be okay when he leaves, he's going to go and get alcohol. . . . Or, he's going to go home and he's going to find out that maybe his wife doesn't have a full appreciation for the pain he's in and makes his life worse at home. . . . No, don't get in the pond, unless you're ready for the consequences, if you want to drain it. (Andrew)

. . . You have very few that can actually impart personal experience with the intellectual knowledge . . . [creating a balance] to where it makes it a reality . . . much like the two freight trains on the same track. . . . I think that there has to be an understanding on the part of the "counselor." Whatever else they are speaking to, they really have no honest connection [to the veteran's experience] except what they have seen or hopefully learned from a book. And I think, or at least I felt that a lot of the observations and determinations that were made from those things [gleaned from books] were not real because they [the helpers] had no real connection to what the person [the veteran] was speaking. . . . It was a cold, almost clinical aspect; you do your job. I saw a lot of the early "help" as being a cover for the bureaucracy and people just doing a job. (Glen)

. . . I had not made the connection of the two. The trains are coming; I'm tied down to the track, and I'm going crazy that this is going to hit. I'm in trouble. It was only by the efforts of a few that were close to me and knew me that . . . made my train wreck somewhat survivable. . . . All they did was force me to be honest with myself . . . . These gentlemen were psychologists. . . . They knew all the games in the book, plus they were Vietnam vets. They knew what was hidden and how it was hidden, plus they knew what the books were saying about how to get it out. They would not let me lie to myself; they refused to believe the little minuets and stories that I was giving about what they should know. [They would say,] "Bull shit, it's a lie, [and] you know it. Tell me the truth." That lasted for a while until I finally broke down and told the truth. (Glen)

. . . I guess the first thing I can say to the person who is really wanting to help, is to stay away from the books. I have spoken to several

people who have done pretty much the same thing trying to be helpful, but they've done it out of what they've learned from books. It's like the "book" that I had, the "Officers Handbook Guide to Combat;" it's worthless in real war. It's only good for toilet paper and not good for that because the pages are too damn slick. It's nice to have and read and put on your bookshelf, but when you're dealing in actuality it's an outline form. You can't take specifics out of the book. It's good to use as an outline. And I think the "professional" should use the outline basically to center the discussion or whatever else, but [the professional should] glean the information necessary to be helpful [from the veteran himself or herself].

I think this is one thing that you're doing right. . . . If you go by the book, it's structured. . . . In the past, people that I dealt with, for the most part, have been honest and honorable and wanting to help; but they've been restricted and somewhat stymied by the structure of what they're told to do either by the system they work for or the fact they only have "the books" that they've had to go by to read. I found here, and I think hopefully that you have, that once you began this program, so many things come out when side issues are raised, that if you're going by a structured program, it's missed! Therefore it makes no sense. I think doing *this* is considerably more helpful than A + B = C.

I know for myself, so many issues have been raised just in my trying to regurgitate to you my feelings. I've learned so much just recalling things I have suppressed- in bringing them out. So I think using a structured approach is totally wrong. It's good in mathematics; it's good in the sciences, but it's disastrous when you're dealing with people. . . . Start up an issue, and if the veteran starts talking around that issue but brings other things out, then begin to deal with *those* things. You already have the issue on paper that you wanted in the first place; you can always go back to that. But this person, this individual, is trying to deal with something else that issue has brought up and out to light. That has to be dealt with. At least in my neophyte non-professional understanding, it's far better, because I can deal with the issue point-to-point with anyone. But if something comes out that is a direct result of, or fostering an issue, unless that point is dealt with, all I have dealt with is a non-issue. . . . I've not learned anything, and neither has the interviewer because I'm still hiding something. (Glen)

. . . Once the individual starts to talk and reveal things, have a tape recorder going because it's going to come out. Then the interviewer or the professional . . . going over the tape, would have a better clue to what the real key is. (Glen)

. . . [In] talking with . . . other combat veterans that have gone through "the counseling sessions" and their complaints thereof, they invariably have, in their complaints, told me what the key is; yet the interviewer never got it because it was never opened. It was always issue by issue by issue, book, chapter, verse because this is what the book says; therefore, it has to be true. Well, you know how long that goes on. You're dealing with people's minds, psyches [and] emotions. I know of no book, outside the Bible, that deals with that. I don't care how intelligent one thinks he or she is, or how much they think they know. In something like this, there is no way in hell for them to know. . . . They were not a participant to begin with. All they have is book-learned knowledge from somebody else's experience.

So to deal with a veteran on this structured level like that, I think, has been the problem--with the Veteran's Administration . . . and other organizations. . . . Everything is so structured. It's wrong, and I think I've tried to explain why I think that it's wrong. I can say from a personal standpoint [that] I know that's wrong because I will lie bullface on a structured, point-to-point [interview] when *the* something that has been brought up [in conversation happens to be] . . . a key issue. [When] I did try to bring up, it was denied because it was not within the structured interview. OK, then I can settle that down [inside me]. "Good! That's out of the way. I don't have to face that, I don't have to face that then," [I think to myself]. I can go back to the structured point-to-point [interview] and lie myself silly because I'm not helping myself, nor am I telling the interviewer any truth. (Glen)

. . . I know some veterans that have spent years hiding in the system. They have this problem, and they've been having this problem for 20 years. No one has ever brought it [their problem] out, so they continue to be a part of the system because it's comfortable. They don't have to tell the truth because interviewers never got it . . .because of the rigid structured system. [The interviewer] never picked up on what was said which was the key issue. So the veteran could hide, and believe me, we did! We're damn good at it. I spent 20 some odd years hiding, I know. I was a chameleon. I did that within the government structures. . . . My entire life I was living as a chameleon. Whatever I felt that they [society] wanted, . . . I'll give them, no problem. But it's a lie. The issue was never dealt with since no one touched upon the issue. If they did, I would overcome them with my "force" . . . and shut them down. I just would not deal with the issue that was the key to unlocking everything. (Glen)

. . . Because of what you said in the question, I don't know what the next question is going to be, but I'm thinking; and then the question comes out. Now, I might think of something that is not directly related to that question, but it comes out as being important to me . . . and . . . that would be something to key in on. Eventually, I'll get around to your question, but it might take a while. But in that while, I'll be spilling out all this other stuff that has come to the surface. That's the problem I think . . . the social help organizations and persons have totally missed. The guys want help, but they have to be forced sometimes because . . .they're hiding. Most of these guys have had 20 to 25 years experience in hiding, so it's tough. The interrogator literally has to know what the hell he or she's doing to get them because they've had so much experience. . . [using] the structured approach. [The structured interview format] has been given to the interviewer in their classes or whatever else instruction [they've received]. Then they're passing that sort of thing on to the veteran, and the veteran is a perfect chameleon [in such a context]. Nobody's helped. If it were that way now, you wouldn't be helped, I wouldn't be helped. We'd both walk away with smiles, but they'd be false smiles; and in reality, I'd get what I'd want, which was [to get] out of here without crying or dealing with the problem. You'd get what you want, which was a session with the veteran. . . . (Glen)

. . . It's a snow-balling process; it is. That's true. You're right [referring to the veteran once again being misunderstood and feeling more lonely], and that would relate to alcohol and substance abuse. Fortunately,

I haven't done that--as far as substance abuse. I've never done drugs at all, even in college. I was one of "those".

. . . But I did drink a lot in college, and I drank more after Vietnam because I was trying to somewhat deaden the pain, deaden memories. By not hitting the issues, and by allowing the veteran to walk away as a chameleon, then you're right you--they feel short-changed; not from the interviewer's standpoint, but from their *own* standpoint because they've lied to themselves again. . . . [Then, after that experience], they go to drugs and/or the bottle. It becomes a snow-balling process, and they wind up as homeless veterans or whatever else.

Yes, [they really want to be caught]. You have to catch them, that's odd. But, hey, I'm speaking from the point of view where I know what I'm talking about. We want to be caught! We want to be helped; but you've got to catch us, first. You have got to put us down to where it starts to come out in reality. That's why I disagree so much with a structured approach. (Glen)

. . . [Healing is] a lengthy process; it's an involved process, particularly now after all this time. You're talking about 20-plus years of hiding. On the other side, the so-called "professional," in trying to deal with this, has had 20-plus years of doing the wrong thing. So it's an ingrained mistake on both parts. I can tell you pointblank, the veteran will never come out on his own, never; not even on his death bed, probably. But once you pin him down, once you hit that *key*, you've got it because of the fact they want all this garbage out. Once the interviewer or professional . . . has that key, then he/she had better have some time because they're going to be listening to a lot of shit. (Glen)

. . . [It's important for others to understand] that whole sense of how if it [Vietnam] didn't create it, it certainly reinforced things that I was beginning to understand in terms of the separateness of individuals and how you could connect briefly and only incompletely. I remember the last time I was talking to you. You asked me, "If you were to do it over again, is there anything you would do differently?" I remember saying that I was a virgin at the time that I went to Vietnam and I didn't mess around with anybody while I was there. Had I to do it all over again I would probably want to have the experience of an intimate physical connection with a woman *prior* to the time I might have possibly gotten blown up. I think that . . . [refers back to] the idea about separateness. I think making love with someone you care for is probably the closest we ever come to being really with someone else.

So I think the main thing that people would need to understand about me now is that even when I'm with you, I'm not totally with you. And the war experience has a lot to do with that. (Tim)

. . . I remember my current wife asking me [about my writing]. . . . This was after I had been writing stories for about a year and a half I guess. I would write at night. . . . She was missing me. About a year and a half into this, this is becoming an issue. Most of what I'd written at that point was Vietnam stories. She said to me, "Why do you need to do this? I mean this is 17 years later." I said, "Because it's come up now." So I think the main thing I guess I want people to know is that different people deal with different things at different times. It might be right after it happens; it might be five years after it happens; it might be 20 years after it happens.

I think the only thing that's important for people to understand is that anybody who has been through an experience, I think at least like Vietnam, is going to have to, at some point in their life, deal with that. They may have lots of different ways of dealing with that (and hope for the positive ones). I think the thing that's important is that people just understand that you may need to give the veteran who is going through something like that, . . . just cut him a little slack some place.

If its bubbling to the surface it's probably because, whether he knows it or not, he's ready to deal with it, or he's ready to start facing the issue of dealing with it, at least. I think there's a lot of people that have [done this:]. . . it probably bubbles to the surface and they try to push it back down again. Then it just bubbles to the surface again, usually in some more salient fashion. I guess I'd say when the veteran feels like it's bubbling to the surface, then he's probably at a point where he should find some way of dealing with it because he's probably ready to at that point, whether he knows it or not.

There should be mechanisms for the veterans to deal with that. . . some people like doing rap groups, some people like doing one-on-one, other people are happy just to sit in their basement and write. But whatever way you're going to deal with it, if it's going to be something constructive--and I don't mean deal with it by going down and sitting in the bar getting sloshed or walking in McDonalds and blowing away 27 people--but constructive ways of dealing with it, it's just going to take some time. . . . Meanwhile the veteran's involved in all kinds of other things in life, home, family, job, whatever it might be. But when he's ready, he's ready and that's the time to strike. I think people just need to understand *that* and maybe, cut them some slack for a while. (Tim)

. . .You need to. . . cut him some slack at the point when he's ready to face whatever it is he has to deal with because it's not always a pretty picture dealing with it.

So what message would I give to professionals? . . . I guess the message would be that I think, at least from my own experience and the experience of other Vietnam veterans I've talked to, that the biggest problem is not knowing how to identify the problem. For me, . . . the biggest problem has always been, ever since the war, this emotional flatness in the sense of just feeling like whatever you're involved in, you must not invest yourself in it too much because something's going to happen to blow it up. I think it took me a long time--and I think I'm one who fairly closely watches myself and questions myself--to realize that that's the root of what's going on in my life at this point. I think it's hard for guys to realize that. I think a lot of them just think they're just going to be able to move on, but it just doesn't seem to work that way. (Tim)

. . .Professionals can help the client, on his or her own, to come to that realization. I don't think you can tell somebody, "Well you're flat emotionally because of your experience in Vietnam." . . .Somehow it has to be brought out from the inside out. It has to come from inside the individual that he or she has to realize that that's what's happening, if in fact this is what's happening. (Tim)

. . . I think the business of telling a story helps a lot. I really do because a lot of times when you're telling your own stories--and I know this feeds back into what I say about writing--you begin to come to the fly

on the wall perspective on yourself when you see what you wrote. Not everybody's a writer, but many people might be able to do that just by telling their story. Although, I think it's harder to do that when you're just telling the story to someone else, like in a verbal session, than it is when you're writing.

. . .I think sometimes what happens when people are talking is [that] they're not even necessarily listening to themselves very well. So you may say something and not even realize it was important because of the flow of conversation. It's said and it's gone; whereas, when you write something you go back and read it. It kind of sticks out. I know that there are some vet groups that did do writing workshops, and I've heard it's been very helpful in terms of vets both articulating, objectifying and being able to see what they've said. So that might be a mechanism that would be helpful. I know that's my own bias and I stand to be a writer. (Tim)

I don't have any advice for the professionals other than the idea that you just somehow need to help the veterans see the core of themselves. I think. . . the core is that a lot of guys come back, and whether they realized it or not, they're just not investing themselves emotionally in their own lives because of protective mechanisms. (Tim)

. . . If there were a way that we could, or the professionals could, re-enforce or help a person to want their sobriety [and] to want a positive outcome, . . . that would work better. I don't know how that would be accomplished, but . . . the person has to want to do it in order to be [able] . . . to move forward. (Ernie)

APPENDIX G

THE ROLE OF SOCIETY IN HURTING AND/OR HELPING THEM

. . . And then after this, to come home--and realize that you were very important there, . . . you *were* important to yourself, and you were important to the other people that were with you--and then you come home and people want you to be what you were before you left. Well, you left as a young kid, and you came back as a goddamn old man with a young kid's body, if you were lucky! You, *you* don't come back. You don't relate to your friends. (Andrew)

. . . Nobody anywhere, at anytime, ever has the right to criticize what we did in Vietnam--anyone of us, all of us as a group. Nobody has the right to criticize what we did in Vietnam *unless* they had a pair of boots on and a rucksack on their back. And that's it. There are things I'm not overwhelmingly proud of, but I'm proud of the people I was with. I'm proud of *nearly* everything I did. Some things I just don't want to think about because war is not all [about] beating your chest and saying, "Yes, we did it! We went over there and did it!" For the people that do it [fight the wars], they carry the baggage with them about the ugly side of it. And that's all. (Andrew)

. . . I think I might not have talked about it for a while when I came back for those years. . . because I felt some bad feelings, like people used to say, "vibes" from people. And I think that maybe I thought I would not be able to control myself if somebody said to me, "We shouldn't have been there," or "We shouldn't have done that." I never had it said to me because I don't think I opened the conversation up enough to ever have it said. I don't know what I would have done because the memory [of those who died and] the value of the lives that were lost might have [caused me to] respond in more than [just] an antagonistic manner. . . . I'm glad I don't have to live with the feeling that I might have done something I shouldn't have. . . at the time. I don't know. But no one has the right to criticize unless you walk in their shoes. (Andrew)

. . . It's just . . . it was a difficult period because, I think a lot of people that cared about Vietnam vets wanted *them,* meaning the veteran, to get on with their life as soon as they got back, so they wouldn't have to dwell on what they went through there. Nobody knew that dwelling on it could be a *saving* experience. Notice I don't say, "healthy," but "*saving*" experience because we know now, as a society, that you help somebody who goes through trauma *immediately*. [By doing so], you make their road much clearer and much more peaceful. (Andrew)

. . . I mean if wanted to bullshit them and tell them I played in the band, they might have listened to it [my Vietnam experience]. For some reason I had, as Mary said, . . . a strange look when I came home, which I think a lot of guys had, [too]: that "thousand-yard stare". Your eyes [were] sunken into your head somewhat, and small things don't matter to you. You get very focused on things that do matter to you. . . . I just didn't feel like anybody wanted to listen, and I don't know if I would have talked, to be honest with you. I just don't know if I was ready. I don't know what would have made me [talk]. (Andrew)

. . . I don't hold any grudges. They [my family] did what they thought was best, and I did what I thought was best: to shut my mouth and continue on. So, am I bitter? I don't know. I think the bitterness is kind of gone out of me. I'm *upset*. I'm upset, and I have to say that because of Vietnam. . . the Gulf War vets got *such* a welcome home party; *such* people welcoming them home. We were responsible for that, there's no question, because they turned on us! They really did turn on us, and we were the people that shouldn't have been turned on. . . . It shouldn't have happened that way. . . . If anybody asks me about it though, I always say I'm real happy for them. (Andrew)

. . . The most important thing to me was that they had said "screw us" when we came home. (Andrew)

. . . As a soldier, you go where the Commander and Chief sends you, and you do the job you're told to do. The job was a rotten, lousy, terrible job. And that's it; that is it. So you expect something when you come home. You don't expect . . . this thing about parades and all of that, that's wonderful. I don't think anybody expected that, but we damn sure didn't expect the kind of response that turned friends against friends. (Andrew)

. . . So, the only thank-yous I got, I guess, were [from] my parents, some of my friends, and some of my parents' friends. It just wasn't a ticker tape parade. I really didn't expect one after I had been in Vietnam six months. We had heard things; we had seen things in the newspapers. So none of us expected any fantastic homecoming, certainly none of the ones, . . . like our parents received in World War II. But at least [we expected] something, or some effort to give recognition; but there was none. It was almost like the sooner we can sweep them under the rug the quicker it will be forgotten. That breeds anger, a lot of anger. [The anger is directed at] oneself. Not at first because one directed it at "the system." In reality, I think that the system was a convenient target. (Glen)

. . . Yes, [society] definitely [played a role in reinforcing me to kind of bury the Vietnam experience deeper and deeper by dishonoring it]. It just wasn't productive to admit that one was in the Vietnam war or conflict. . . . Nobody wanted to hear it. I have personal experience that even in the business world if you're a Vietnam vet, nobody wanted you. You were almost ostracized because you are crazy, you're on drugs or you were totally anti-social and could go off and kill hundreds of people instantly, if not sooner, if the wrong thing upsets you. That's what the media promoted so much. Businesses just did not want to deal with that because of the volatility of what they had heard. The only way I got back into the world, you might say, was [by] going back into the CIA. It was also a safety valve for me [which] I could not have gotten from business. . . . (Glen)

. . . After the Vietnam thing, and after the Storm, I think the government, and . . . a lot of the people are becoming concerned about what we went through and why we're never able to turn loose of it. A lot of the problems of a lot of individuals, I think, resulted specifically from the fact that no one was there for them, to be able to turn lose of what they had seen, done, felt or heard. "How can I deal with this, this horror?" Nobody

would believe them if they did [share]. Nobody cared because everybody was carrying around pictures of Chairman Mo and waiving the Vietcong flag when these guys came back. This created a definite animosity between their peers and themselves. I know it did with me. So there was nothing; you're in a class by yourself. You're locked in your own little world. That's why when Vietnam vets get together, it's almost like instant recognition even if they're strangers because there's nobody like us. Nobody wants to be like us, fortunately. . . . We've gone through so much, not so much over there--that's the normalcy of war. If you get hurt or die, that's normal. It's happened for ten-thousand years. War is war, period. But to come home or come back not home--come back and be treated thus, that's the problem. That's where the problematical situations began for all the neuroses that all of us have had to undergo and suffer. Unfortunately a lot are still suffering so. (Glen)

. . . Coming back when I was in . . . graduate school, . . . the only people that I associated with were veterans because they're the only ones that really understood. Of course in the '70's, . . . the climate was not, shall I say, progressively kind to Vietnam veterans anyway, for one reason. But even after that, I've always gravitated toward the veteran because there's a closeness among the combat vets that nobody will ever know what it's like, because they weren't there. Very very few civilians have tried to--or wanted to--get involved within that "netherworld" that we all live in, either for boredom, or it frightens the hell out of them. . . . People don't take very well to the . . . morbid humor that was *our* humor over there. I mean things that make you sick now, *that* was humorous. It makes me sick just thinking about them, just about. But it's amazing, the transformation from the logical, rational, thinking human being to the animal you become in combat. Amazing! And I can understand, only recently understand, where the vast majority of civilians are coming from when they want no part of us. One, that they don't understand; two, it is frightening; and three, a lot of them just don't care. So one tends to gravitate with people that understand you. (Glen)

. . . Then, on the other hand, the veterans, particular the Vietnam veterans, do not know how to act like civilians. I mean, I've been in dinner Andrews and things and brought up subjects that stopped the whole party. I mean, no more dinner, forget it. [I've] had people look at you like, "Where's the straight jacket?" I can understand that now, but then I just [thought], "Well why not? That's part of it." This was funny to me, for you asked the question. You said you wanted to know. Do you really want to know now? That's what upset me a lot at first- these so called pseudo well-meaning civilians who would say, "Well, how can be help you? Tell me what happened." You tell them; they get sick, and they disassociate themselves from you. . . . You have young people that go off to war as young people. Those that return alive are different. They're scarred forever, forever! And the people left back here will *never* understand that. I don't care how good they try to be, or how much they want to be, they will never understand. That is sad, but that's the price we paid for war, I guess. . . . From the standpoint of combat vets, that's not just veterans but actual combat vets--you've heard the term, "warmongers?" That's bullshit! Your combat veteran is so antagonistic against war; it's pathetic because we've lived through it. We've seen it up close and personally--the hell, the derivation, the depravity. War is hell; General Sherman was quite correct.

We don't want any part of that, but here again it's a necessary evil within life. Once you're associated with this, then, for whatever reason, you become somewhat dissociated with the people that stayed behind for the very reason that they don't understand, or do not want to understand. Very very often, as I found the last twenty plus years, you can't relate to them because there's been a huge chasm created that neither one can bridge. (Glen)

. . . I guess the main thing that's happened between then and now is the Country [US] has realized that it really didn't do anything in the way of supporting individual veterans when they got back. I don't think at that time they even thought much about the kind of problems we might have. I don't even think *we* [the veterans] had thought very much about the kind of problems we might have. I think there's been a lot more recognition of that [more recently], but. . . it's just amazing what it took before it even got to that point. A couple of years ago I read a statistic in the newspaper that more Vietnam veterans had killed themselves, had committed suicide, *since* the war ended than had died in the war itself. It was just staggering! Did it take fifty-five thousand of us to kill ourselves before the Country would realize, "Oh gee, maybe these guys have a problem!" I think very belatedly the Country has begun to realize that it wasn't like World War II. People got sent over there and *then* they got "fucked-up" by it. "Then" because they just kind of dribbled back by little dribs and drabs, as opposed to everybody coming back to parades, all at once sort of thing. There wasn't any kind of support network setup with that [type of piecemeal return]. In World War II, there was a war. Then it ended. Then there was peace and there were services. This [the Vietnam war] is something that just went on for 11 years. The ones who came back were "fucked-up." Meanwhile we're still sending more over there. . . . There wasn't that transition from. . . war to peace that would kind of lead things to create support groups. . . because the thing was still going on. So I guess it was a surprise to me that it took another 10 years after everybody had got back for them to get around and realize that, "Gee, I wish I had paid attention to some of this stuff." But I'm glad to see they did, finally. (Tim)

. . . It's been a long-strange trip. I don't know if I would have gotten to where I am now faster if there had been more sensitivity or maybe even just more knowledge of the kind of thing Vietnam veterans wound up facing when we came back. I mean, I'd like to think that if there had been a responsive therapeutic community, or through the VA, if there had been mechanisms being aware of these kinds [of things] that there would be more support and more ways for people to get from point "A" to point "B". I'd like to think that people would be able to do that faster and smoother. I hope we've all learned something from the Vietnam veterans' experience. I suspect to some extent we have. When the Gulf War thing happened [and] the people came back, there was a lot more stuff in place quickly to help people deal with things. I know now in the service--I remember seeing something in the paper not long ago [and] this may have been a National Guard Unit or something--they had like a "Family Day". The wives and kids came down to wherever the training is with the guys and they talked about issues that can affect people when you go overseas. I mean, this was even before they had been overseas. So I guess, I think we've learned. This society has probably learned a lot from them, and that's good. It's just too bad it wasn't there then [when I returned]. . . because it would have

been nice to kind of get to this point of relative peace and understanding of the processes [sooner]. [I would have benefited from knowing earlier]. . . how what you went through isn't just something you can put behind you and be a solid citizen without dealing with it somehow. It would have been nice to get to that point a little sooner than 20 some years later. And I think, if I had been able to do that, of how far along I might be by now, if I had been able to do this sort of thing 10 or 15 years earlier or something like that. And maybe that's just me. I mean, I really wasn't seeking out anything either, so [who knows]. . . . This is probably the first time I've really tried to--other than in stories which tend to be more metaphorical--articulate for someone else how I got from point "A" to point "B". That's been good. It helps crystallize it some. (Tim)

APPENDIX H
IDEAS TO REMAIN MINDFUL OF WHEN HELPING TRAUMATIZED INDIVIDUALS

- It is as if the therapist is on probation initially, as trust, safety and caring are assessed
- Allow for a conversational tone to develop in the interview that is open, sensitive and responsive
- Listen carefully; take the time to listen, allowing the survivor to complete his or her thought or story
- Connect their process of recovery to the broader issue of possibly helping other survivors
- The therapist must portray a truthful and honest quality
- Be OK with not knowing; do not act knowledgeable when you are not; learn from the survivor when confused
- Resist the need to "do a lot" and/or make things better
- Respect the flow of dialogue and avoid frequent interruptions
- Avoid judgmental, critical and evaluative comments or gestures
- Provide multiple perspects on matters
- Work to make the pain the survivor is experiencing tolerable
- Understand the survivor in the context of his or her history; learn where he or she came from and where he or she is going
- Engage the survivor so that he or she actively participates in his or her own therapy
- Getting started in therapy is the hardest aspect of it and the helper must be patient
- Initially, the survivor will not want to discuss his or her trauma
- There is a tendency for the survivor to blame nothing or too much on his or her trauma experience
- Therapy needs to consist of frequent visits without excessive time between sessions
- Monitor the survivor for substance abuse throughout treatment, for the potential to use substances is high during therapy
- Try to develop support for the survivor in his or her home environment when he or she begins therapy; educate supportive others so that they appreciate what recovery entails

- Do not begin trauma work with the survivor unless you are committed to see the therapy through to resolution; rough times are likely to occur
- An empathic understanding of the survivor's experience is necessary
- A healthy connection (or relationship) to the survivor is important
- Avoid cold, sterile approaches to treatment that appear "book-driven" and overtly structure-based; too much detachment from the survivor will arouse defensiveness. Do not give the structure driving the interview more attention than the survivor who is seeking help
- Assist the survivor in being honest with himself or herself and to not hide from painful issues; self-deception can provide initial relief but results in more pain
- The helper should remain open and flexible to the survivor's experience; use the survivor as a resource in his or her own treatment
- Issues that appear extraneous or not central can be important in their own right and frequently lead to core issues
- Form a collaborative working relationship with the survivor
- Audio taping the interview is very helpful for the survivor who may not be paying close attention to his or her own story
- The "real" issues in treatment can easily remain buried or obscure; A part of the survivor wants to avoid confronting his or her pain and may do so if given the opportunity
- Be alert to cliché responses to questions that may be concealing pain and conflict
- Listen closely after asking a question and give ample time for a response to fully evolve
- Feelings of alienation and estrangement increase if the survivor leaves the session feeling misunderstood, or if he or she successfully convinces the interviewer that "everything is fine" thereby avoiding issues causing him pain and distress
- Understand the powerful themes that traumatization teaches the survivor, such as emotional detachment from others and one's emotions
- Survivors deal with trauma differently, including different pacing, times of readiness to participate in therapy and issues to be resolved
- Any traumatic experience is going to require that people make sense of it and come to terms with it

- When the survivor is dealing with the trauma, he or she needs others in his or her environment to be understanding, supportive, flexible and provide him or her space
- If the trauma begins to surface in the survivor's life, that is an indication the survivor is ready to face it; When the trauma "bubbles up," there will be a counter-response of wanting to suppress it
- The survivor must find constructive ways of dealing with his or her traumatic experience when it begins to surface in his or her life
- Others need to understand the excruciating pain and difficulties associated with addressing the survivor's traumatic experience
- Assist the survivor in recognizing that his or her emotional numbness *is* a problem and will not just go away on its own
- The survivor must come to his or her own realization of problems; the conclusions of a counselor are insufficient if they are not also shared by the survivor
- Telling one's story is very important, just as reading what one said in his or her telling; there is a problem in that the survivor does not listen to his or her own words carefully, so reading what he or she has said is significant
- It is important to locate the "core issue" of the survivor which is often that he or she is not investing himself or herself emotionally into his or her own life due to protective mechanisms
- Anything that can increase the survivor's motivation to change and to face his or her trauma is useful

ENDNOTES

[1] The "transformative process of meaning" is not referring to a static end that can be achieved (i.e., a more a helpful way of viewing past events, or an adaptive cognitive reframe), but rather it depicts the dynamic process of meaning making as a phenomena in and of itself. Both Lifton and Gergen are clear that it is not *made meanings,* but the ability to make events meaningful, to transform events into meaningful stories that is crucial. It is this transforming ability that is lost after severe trauma and successful therapy, according to Lifton, "re-animates" this creative and transforming ability. In other words, the literal meanings the survivor often faces in recalling his or her trauma become more symbolic and flexible. The potential for making new meanings and healing follows the return of this symbolic capability.

[2] The role of hope can be found in predicting the future of the past. Since the meaning one draws from one's past is never fixed, the opportunities for new meanings are endless. Traumatization often challenges the survivor's ability to find and maintain hope.

[3] The fourth step requires the AA member to conduct a "searching and fearless moral inventory" of his or her self. The fifth step encourages the member to tell his story "to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs." (From Alcoholics Anonymous, 3rd Ed. (New York: World Services, 1976), pp. 59-60).

[4] This tendency to protect others from themselves was evident when they awkwardly struggled to say good-bye in the group interview. They were careful to not make obligations that if broken, would hurt or offend. They left the meeting with the freedom to connect again or to remain apart.

[5] Cultural level is used here to be inclusive of historical and political contexts as well. The cultural level is the broad realm of dominant narratives that any society upholds as true and/or worthy of value.

[6] One example is how society has tended to view veterans as "warmongers." The participants emphatically declared that many--if not most--veterans are extreme advocates for peace because of what they know about the brutality of war.

[7] The therapist persuades the client to follow different maps by teaching alternative routes on how to cope and function.

[8] This speech was given as testimony before the US Senate Subcommittee on Veteran Affairs, May 21, 1980, Washington, D.C. by John P. Wilson, Ph.D. Source: Baer, G. & Howell-Koehler, N. (1984). Vietnam: The battle comes home (pp. 16-17). New York: Morgan & Morgan.

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